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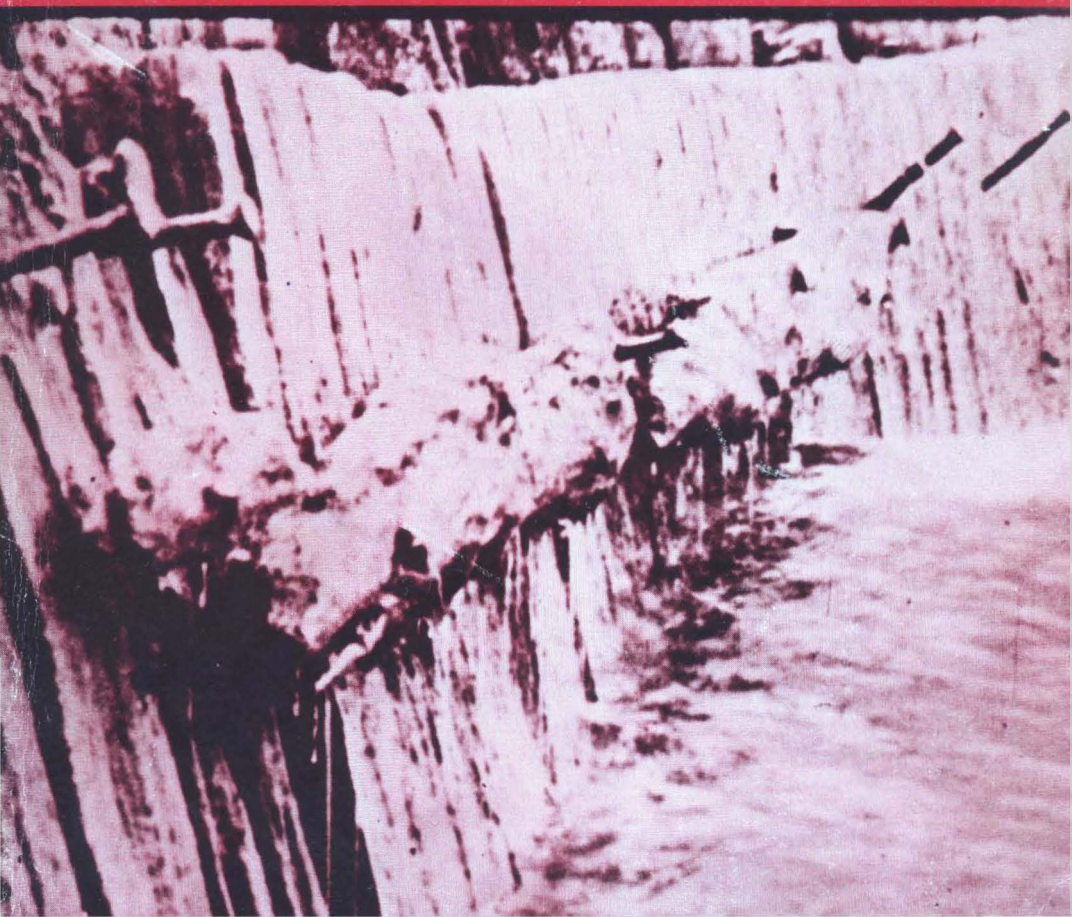
STRUCTURAL FILM ANTHOLOGY



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STRUCTURAL FILM ANTHOLOGY

Edited and with an Introduction by

Peter Gidal

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Cover: Frame from Malcolm LeGrice's *Yes No Maybe Maybe Not*

Introduction

This anthology of texts about what have been termed Structural Films attempts to bring together some of the more important essays and articles on those films which have formed the core of film work in this field since its inception. It is a first attempt to bring together texts from Europe, Britain and the United States, on films from Europe, Britain and the United States. In the past we have been inundated with the parochial, American view of avant-garde film work, as expounded on both sides of the Atlantic. This anthology was published to coincide with the series of eighteen programmes, Structural Film Retrospective, at the National Film Theatre, London, in May 1976.

As it happened, no film-maker was included in the programmes who had not produced relevant work before 1971, though many works were from after that year. No new films were introduced; this was a retrospective programme intended to enable a *viewing* that saw each film in the context of each other film, that could recognise alliances and misalliances between films, that could attempt to deal with the individual filmworks and the critical practice which preceded or followed.

In some cases, the critical practice here is a virtually complete repression through ideology of the text of the film; in the gaps presented work can now take place. The lengths of the sections are dictated by the materials of interest available, and unfortunately in a few cases only very slight material existed. I hope that the selection will not offend; the younger Americans have been left out, as have many of the younger British, because of the wish for a solid retrospective programme as elucidated above. No doubt there are quite a few film-makers completely unknown to me, and to nearly everyone else, who have done and may be doing very important work, and whose work remains 'out of view' for a variety of sociological reasons, none of which are praiseworthy. I wish to thank all the film-makers and writers, obviously.

For this reprint nothing has been changed, though a few minor errors have been corrected and Ben Brewster's review of the Anthology in *Screen* has been included as an afterword. I call attention to the 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film' article in its original form in *Studio International* (November 1975), and to Deke Dusinberre's article relating to it in *Screen* (Summer 1977).

P.G.
January
1978

Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film

Peter Gidal

Structural/Materialist film attempts to be non-illusionist. The process of the film's making deals with devices that result in demystification or attempted demystification of the film process. But by 'deals with' I do not mean 'represents'. In other words, such films do not document various film procedures, which would place them in the same category as films which transparently document a narrative, a set of actions, etc. Documentation, through usage of the film medium as transparent, invisible, is exactly the same when the object being documented is some 'real event', some 'film procedure', some 'story', etc. An avant-garde film defined by its development towards increased materialism and materialist function does not *represent*, or *document*, anything. The film produces certain relations between segments, between what the camera is aimed at and the way that 'image' is presented. The dialectic of the film is established in that space of tension between materialist flatness, grain, light, movement, and the supposed reality that is represented. Consequently a continual attempt to destroy the illusion is necessary. In Structural/Materialist film, the in/film (not in/frame) and film/viewer material relations, and the relations of the film's structure, are primary to any representational content. The structuring aspects and the attempt to decipher the structure and anticipate/recorrect it, to clarify and analyse the production-process of the specific image at any specific moment, are the root concern of Structural/Materialist film. The specific construct of each specific film is not the relevant point; one must beware not to let the construct, the shape, take the place of the 'story' in narrative film. Then one would merely be substituting one hierarchy for another within the same system, a formalism for what is traditionally called content. This is an absolutely crucial point.[1]

Devices

Through usage of specific filmic devices such as repetition within duration one is forced to attempt to decipher both the film's material and the film's construct, and to decipher the precise transformations that each co/incide/nce of cinematic techniques produces. The attempt is primary to any specific shape, otherwise the discovery of shape (fetishising shape or system) may become the theme, in fact, the narrative of the film. This is a crucial distinction

for a (dialectically) materialist definition of structural film. That is why Structural/Materialist film in fact demands an orientation of definition completely in opposition to the generally used vague notions concerning 'Structural Film'.

Production

Each film is a record (not a representation, not a reproduction) of its own making. Production of relations (shot to shot, shot to image, grain to image, image dissolution to grain, etc.) is a basic function which is in direct opposition to *re*production of relations. Elsewhere in this essay I shall try to elucidate further this problematic of production versus reproduction. Suffice it to say here that it is the core of meaning which differentiates illusionist from anti-illusionist film. When one states that each film is a record of its own making, this refers to shooting, editing, printing stages, or separations of these, dealt with specifically. Such film mitigates against dominant (narrative) cinema. Thus viewing such a film is at once viewing a film and viewing the 'coming into presence' of the film, i.e. the system of consciousness that produces the work, that is produced by and in it.

Represented 'Content'

There is this representational 'reality' one is aiming the camera at. This remains true even if for example the representational content is pared down to the filmstrip itself being pulled through the printer. In fact this isn't necessarily a paring down at all. The Structural/Materialist film must minimise the content in its overpowering, imagistically seductive sense, in an attempt to get through this miasmic area of 'experience' and proceed with film as film. Devices such as loops or seeming loops, as well as a whole series of technical possibilities, can, carefully constructed to operate in the correct manner, serve to veer the point of contact with the film past internal content. The content thus serves as a function upon which, time and time again, a film-maker works to bring forth the filmic event.[2]

The usage of the word *content* so far has been within the common usage, i.e. representational content. In fact, the real content is the form, form become content. Form is meant as formal operation, not as composition. Also, form must be distinguished from style, otherwise it serves merely in its reactionary sense to mean formal*ism*, such as: this formal usage (e.g. Welles) versus that (e.g. Sternberg).

Film as material

The assertion of film as material is, in fact, predicated upon representation, in as much as 'pure' empty acetate running through the projector gate without image (for example) merely sets off another level of abstract (or non-abstract) associations. Those associations, when instigated by such a device, are no more materialist or nonillusionist than any other associations. Thus the film event is by no means, through such a usage, necessarily demystified. 'Empty

screen' is no less significatory than 'carefree happy smile'.[3] There are myriad possibilities for co/optation and integration of filmic procedures into the repertoire of meaning.

The Viewer

The mental activation of the viewer is necessary for the procedure of the film's existence. Each film is not only structural but also structuring. This is extremely important as each moment of film reality is not an atomistic, separate entity but rather a moment in a relativistic generative system in which one can't *simply* break down the experience into elements. The viewer is forming an equal and possibly more or less opposite 'film' in her/his head, constantly anticipating, correcting, re-correcting – constantly intervening in the arena of confrontation with the given reality, i.e. the isolated chosen area of each film's work, of each film's production.

Dominant cinema

In dominant cinema, a film sets up characters (however superficially deep their melodramas) and through identification and various reversals, climaxes, complications (usually in the same order) one aligns oneself unconsciously with one or more characters. These internal connections between viewer and viewed are based on systems of identification which demand primarily a passive audience, a passive viewer, one who is *involved* in the meaning that word has taken on within film-journalese, i.e. to be not involved, to get swept along through persuasive emotive devices employed by the film director. This system of cinematic functioning categorically rules out any dialectic. It is a cinematic functioning, it should be added, analogous on the part of the film director to that of the viewer, not to mention the producer, who is not a producer, who has no little investment in the staking out of the economics of such repression. What some of the more self-defined 'left-wing' directors would rationalise in terms of dialectic are merely cover-ups for identification, selling the same old wares, *viz* Antonioni and the much less talented Bertolucci, Pasolini, Losey, not to mention committed right-wing directors. Thus, if a character is somewhat more complex, or if the acting is of a higher order, or if the lighting cameraman does most of the work, then the director rationalises the work which would seem to imply that he is as taken in by the phantasy as the viewer. Whether he is or not (there are few she's in such a position) is in fact irrelevant. The ideological position is the same.

Dialectic

There is a distinct difference between what can be termed *the ambiguousness of an identification process*[4] and a *dialectic functioning*. Ambiguousness posits each individual viewer (or reader, listener, etc.) as subject: the subject, that is, who forms *the* interpretation. One becomes posited, formed, constituted, in fact, as the subject of the self-expression and self-representation through the mediation of a repressive ideological structure. That ideological structure is in

this case narrative cinema, part of which is the process of identification. Ambiguousness aligns itself as a concept (and therefore as a reality) with the concept of freedom and individualism. The two latter concepts are extremely rigidified in late capitalism. The individual also thus becomes posited as static, as essence, as ideal (or referring to the possibility of such). The individual becomes posited as unitary, 'free' view, centred in deep perspective space away from the screen, and invisibly solidified, ever-present. Our whole formation towards, and in, filmic enterprises, is dominated by such ideological strangleholds.

Identification

The commercial cinema could not do without the mechanism of identification.[5] It is the cinema of consumption, in which the viewer is of necessity not a producer,[6] of ideas, of knowledge. Capitalist consumption reifies not only the structures of the economic base but also the constructs of abstraction. Concepts, then, do not produce concepts; they become, instead, ensconced as static 'ideas' which function to maintain the ideological class war and its invisibility, the state apparatus in all its fields.

The mechanism of identification demands a passive audience, a passive mental posture in the face of a life unlived, a series of representations, a phantasy identified with for the sake of 90 minutes' illusion. And that 'phantasy' is often not *even* the (insipid) utopian romance of 'what should be' (Marcuse's justification for Goethe's poems) nor the so-called 'intervention' in bourgeois morality that at moments *may* be approached in de Sade, Lautréamont, Sacher-Masoch (never without intensely counterproductive repressions and paranoiac violence stimulating and appeasing the bourgeois' tastes and tolerances).

Identification is inseparable from the procedures of narrative, though not totally covered by it. The problematic centres on the question as to whether narrative is inherently authoritarian, manipulatory and mystificatory, or not. The fact that it requires identificatory procedures and a lack of distanciation to function, and the fact that its only possible functioning is at an illusionistic level, indicates that the problematic has a clear resolution. In that sense, it is more of a problem than a problematic. The ramifications of the crucial question are very limited. Narrative is an illusionistic procedure, manipulatory, mystificatory, repressive. The repression is that of space, the distance between the viewer and the object, a repression of real space in favour of the illusionist space. The repression is, equally importantly, of the in-film spaces, those perfectly constructed continuities. The repression is also that of time. The implied lengths of time suffer compressions formed by certain technical devices which operate in a codified manner, under specific laws, to repress (material) film time.

Narrative and deconstruction

A further point on narrative: while the deconstruction of narrative as an

academic exercise is not of vital import, it would be in any case a useful function towards expropriating the ownership of the codes of narrativity. Which means that the meanings formed by certain filmic operations could be analysed and no more be the privileged possession of the owners of the means of production; in this case, the means of production of meaning in film. Thus deconstruction exercises, in their limited way, are not irrelevant as sociological insight into certain filmic operations. Deconstruction exercises, maintained filmically (i.e. on film, in film) are direct translations from the written into film, and are thus filmically reactionary, though illustrative of certain ideas *about* film. The re-translation back into language (words) would seem to negate the necessity of narrative-deconstruction being undertaken on, or in, film, rather than in writing. This has now dawned, perhaps, on the overzealous graduates who wish to make statements about certain usages of narrative.

Apart from work in deconstruction, there is also that filmwork which is interpreted as deconstruction, works which have as their basic project an overhauling (not a criticising and not a smashing) of narrative, such as the pseudo-narratives of Robbe-Grillet's appalling films, or Straub's post- (and sometimes pre-) Brechtian exercises in distanciation and reflection. (Even here the Brecht of the theatre is mistaken for the Brechtian theoriser.)[7] Other examples are Dreyer's purist set pieces of dramatics, straightforward identificatory narratives, the identification merely shifted from the psychological/emotional to the psychological/rationalistic. The identification into the narrative is through the thoughts, the ideas about the actions, the decisions, the *ratio*, instead of the melodramatic unthought motivations of characters propelled by unthought 'fear', 'desire', etc. as in most other films. A study is urgently needed on the theme of narrative versus non-narrative form and on the inadequacy of the mechanistic deconstruction approach which ends up illustrating rather than being, which ends up static, time denying, posited as exemplary rather than relative, contradictory, motored into filmic, durational transformation through dialectic procedures.

Art movements

Two art movements had their special effects on the current avant garde, Structural/Materialist film, and on those structural films which are working in that direction. The art movements were: the aesthetics of Abstract-Expressionism (though not necessarily the imagist results) and Minimalism (to include such work as Stella's).[8] A major problem erupts here: that of making visible the procedure, presenting such as opposed to using it. Throughout this essay, virtually every problem centres on the opposition between usage and presentation, incorporating versus foregrounding, etc. There exists also the problem of the 'sensitive' artist, ever-present *in* the final object, which can be one end the means to which is an art which may record its own making. But the other end, and the division must be carefully analysed and researched with each case in question, is that of an art which is *not* an

imagist creation, a decorative object (narrative or otherwise) separated from its means of production without a trace left. If the final work magically represses the procedures which in fact are there in the making, then that work is not a materialist work. This is a crucial point as to usage versus presentation. And in each work many factors are operating which produce either an over-determination of the usage (i.e. repression) of the procedures, *or* an over-determination of the presentedness of the procedures.

Jacques Derrida has clarified what in fact is at stake in a work, in the procedure of constituting a work. His definition of *differance* (with an 'a') is useful precisely because it clarifies an aspect of work which previously was latent but not brought to speech, not adequately theorised, and which therefore always fell back into the ideology of illusionism and unseen subject (the artist).

> We shall designate by the term *differance* the movement by which language or any code, any system of reference in general, becomes historically constituted as a fabric of differences . . . *Differance* is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be 'present', appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to a future element. This trace relates no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by this very relation to what it is not, to what it absolutely is not; that is, not even to a past or a future considered as a modified present . . . We ordinarily say that a sign is put in place of the thing itself, the present thing – 'thing' holding here for the sense as well as the referent. Signs represent the present in its absence; they take the place of the present. When we cannot take hold of or show the thing, let us say the present, the being present, when the present does not present itself, *then* we signify, we go through the detour of signs. (J. Derrida, in *Speech and Phenomena*, 'Differance')

The aesthetics of Abstract-Expressionism in fact could produce an imagist object which never separated itself from individualist psychological origins, whereas the 'same' aesthetic base could function in certain works as production itself *presented,* distanced. Such presentation of production functions in certain drawings of targets by Jasper Johns (for example), distancing the object as object, as created text, towards which the various marks added to each other, negating, erasing, produce further elaborations towards an as yet unfulfilled total surface.[9] (*Total* is used in the sense of at some point coming to a stop.) The essential locus is again the question of psychological orientation, that is, *identification,* whether into the 'fantastic' or the 'real' or the 'surreal', in opposition to stated notions of *distancing*. But it must be clarified that the distancing is *not* from some *wholly elaborated* fantastic, real or surreal, from which a distance is created. Rather, the text

itself is elaborated and constituted in such a way that the whole work process of reading the marks necessitates a reading of differences and a dialecticisation of the material procedures which produce the marking one is confronted with. The subject of the work is not the invisible artist symbolically inferred through the work's presence, but rather the whole foregrounded fabric of the complex system of markings itself.

What Frank Stella may have verbalised correctly (see footnote [8]) did not prevent his work from becoming exactly the Abstract-Expressionist problem, the whole conglomeration of feelings, associations, seductions, representations which an imagist work demands no matter how 'process'-oriented the production process itself was. Similarly the process of making a Welles or Fassbinder film is not in an adequate way the product. This is the root of the whole problem I am trying to get at. Some of Stella's early works could escape this Abstract-Expressionist route, just as many of Johns' and Giacometti's works fail to avoid or solve that problem. Process as general definition is in fact vacuous. This vacuous definition is nevertheless filled, ideologically rigidified, in such a way that few works escape through the gap left, and those works are a conjuncture (happenstance or not) of a whole range of incidents and factors, co/incide/nces which enable this escape from the co/opting 'process' definition (and concreteness). This 'escape' is not a displacement (which would therefore create a misunderstanding, or a theoretical gap, elsewhere) or a suppression, but an adequate solution of questions correctly posed in terms of materialist practice and theoretical embodiment.

That does not mean the artist consciously verbalised the degrees and factors which had significance in the creation of the object that finds its way out, escaping the recuperative pseudo-freedom of the epithet 'process'. Stella's good intentions count for little, and vice versa for Klee's often naturalistic, representational, evolutionist notions, radically countermanded by those works which form a conjuncture of structural dissociation, pared down 'simplicity' in terms of imagery and internal relations, formalised colour schemes and other factors, to realise (produce) works which function in a non-naturalised, textual presentedness. Non-naturalisation means specifically that the works don't fit into the category of naturalness, whether this naturalness refers to the image-content (i.e. naturalness of the representation) or to what is natural *for painting*, what is allowable, what does not necessitate a reading but rather falls blindly into parameters of meaning consciously or unconsciously predefined.

Reading duration

A materialist reading at one with the inscription of the work (which *is* the work) is enabled or forced; Klee's usage, in these cases, of the virtually unloaded or nearly empty signifier (Foucault cites them as 'completely empty signifiers') is possibly the dominant factor in the adequate presentation of materialist art practice in works such as *Alter Klang, Doppelzelt,* etc.[10] Signifiers approaching emptiness means merely (!) that the image taken does

not have a ready associative analogue, is not a given symbol or metaphor or allegory; that which is signified by the signifier, that which is conjured up by the image given, is something formed by past connections but at a very low key, not a determining or over-determining presence, merely a not highly charged moment of meaning. Thus, although this example is oversimplified, the edge of a leaf seen for a moment only, or only seen (in a film, for instance) slightly related to other equally insignificant signifiers (within a context which allows them to operate as insignificant), does not necessarily lead to associations stronger than 'leaf' or 'another leaf quite similar' or a non-emotional grasp of 'room, leaf' without existential *angst,* doubt, a sense of lonely fragility, etc. And that low-level signifier in momentary interplay with other low-level signifiers foregrounds a possibly materialist play of differences which don't have an overriding hierarchy of meaning, which don't determine the ideological reading, which don't lead into heavy associative symbolic realms. The actual relations between images, the handling, the appearance, the 'how it is', etc., takes precedence over any of the 'associative' or 'internal' meanings. Thus is presented the arbitrariness of meaning imbibed in, for example, such an image-moment of a leaf. The unnaturalness, ungivenness, of any possible meaning is posited. Such practice thereby counters precisely the ideological usages which are dominant; the usages which *give meaning* to images, things, signs, etc., meanings which are then posited as natural, as inherent. The whole idealist system is opposed by a materialist practice of the production of meaning, of the arbitrariness of the signifier. (Meaning is *made*.) And for this concept, this thought, the semiotic notions of signifier/signified are of tremendous import.

In film, duration as material piece of time is the basic unit.

> Does a painting come into existence all at once? No, it's built up piece by piece, not different from a house. When a point becomes movement and line, it takes up time. Similarly, when a line pulls itself out into a plane. And the same when a flat plane becomes a three dimensional enclosure. And the viewer, does he (she) respond to the work as a whole? Often yes, unfortunately.
>
> Paul Klee, *Schöpferische Konfession*

I am not positing direct cause and effect, or even direct analogue, between painting and film. Similarly, the effect, more specifically, of Abstract-Expressionism and Minimalism on Structural/Materialist film is not direct.

The problematic of reading duration when viewing a painting was important to Klee and others. Actual duration can only exist in film, in terms of the approximation towards a 1:1 relation between work and viewer (production time and 'reading' time). Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera,* Eisenstein's *Strike,* Lumière's films, form a core of basic work in this field of research, the anti-illusionist project. As to Structural music, Bach's preludes and fugues relate strongly to some of the work of Terry Riley. Steve Reich's *Stick Piece,* etc. More specific to film: more often than not, 'real' time is utilised in the Structural/Materialist film, in clearly defined segments or in the

film as a whole, thus breaking from illusionistic time (substructured in codes of narrativity). The closing of the gap in space between viewer and viewed, and between the representation in one shot and another, is a basic repressive illusionist device. The implication of an unseen splice to integrate two shots also elides the function of editing, the function of producing, from material segments, a new complex relation. Instead, there is a seeming natural flow established, which suppresses all procedures of the editing stages. The concept of integration rather than disruption is predicated on a repression of the material relations specific to the film process, and this of course is not unconnected with the violence done to (eradicate) the adequate *presentation* of material relations in the spheres of ideology, the image, plastic representation, narrative mimesis, etc. Attempted in Structural/Materialist film is a non-hierarchical, cool, separate unfolding of a perceptual activity. That perceptual activity is *not* to be understood as relegating the primary function to the individual perceiver, who of course is embedded in ideological structures/strictures. The problematics of perception as a concept have yet to be satisfactorily delineated. Still, film is a perceptual activity (amongst other things) and without perception and the relations attendant upon that process there is no film practice (or in any case not one that is non-idealistic, not one that is not mechanistically materialist).

Distance

Through the attempted non-hierarchical, cool, separate unfolding a distance-(ing) is sought. This distance reinforces (rather than denies) the dialectic interaction of viewer with each film moment, which is necessary if it is not to pass into passiveness and needlessness. This interaction on the physical level and on the level of critical praxis is obvious. The real time element demands such a consciousness and will. I can here only hint at the deeper problematic within which the 'real time' 1:1 relation between viewer and viewed is located.

Aspects of time

(1) 'Real time', that is, time present as it is for the film-maker, denoted not connoted, at the stage of shooting, editing, printing, projecting, and interrelations of these. Commonly, 'real time' is presented in single takes or film segments utilised for their actual duration (often after many viewings they separate themselves as such). (2) There is illusionistic time, time made to seem what it is not, such as in conventional and (it must be said) in much Eisensteinian editing. E.g., cut from 10.15 p.m. London interior – the lovers kiss - to midnight near the lake, husband and wife murder each other (long shot), either implying a linear thread of events with time compressed, or a simultaneity with time compressed. (3) The third 'example' is that of post-Newtonian, Einsteinian time. There is here no absolute value other than that of the interaction of film moment and viewer. This relativistic time may but does not necessarily connect with 'real time'. The notion of 'real time' on its own fails to take account precisely of this relativistic nature of time, the

absence of some universal clock, though for lack of a more precise definition 'real time' did serve its purpose apropos for example much of Warhol's filmwork (interrupted by splices and leader-fogging).

Reflexiveness

Another matter which the investigation of Structural/Materialist film brings forth is the bearing it has on reflexiveness, which is inculcated by a film through certain procedures. Reflexiveness, self-reflexiveness or auto-reflexiveness, is a condition of self-consciousness which invigorates the procedure of filmic analysis *during* the film viewing event. Thus it is not merely a matter of reflection, or thinking, broadly taken. Reflexiveness, as a concept, can serve a meaning counterproductive to the direction Structural/Materialist film would give it.[11] It can, for example, serve as a decoy, an alibi, the opening up of individual interpretation. Such simulacra turn the ideological thrust of an issue towards radically reactionary paths, and bring one's work to a point where each conceptual entity must be clearly defined in order not to move down a blind alley. Without such rigour, one finds the illusionist, narrative, identificatory individualist mode of cinema is re-presented, re-instated without a battle, and the wearying struggle to define clearly and precisely is taken up again at the moment of least vigilance. A weak link in one's analysis of idealist, anti-materialist practices can turn a whole body of work (in film, for example) to uselessness in countering a forthcoming film's radically *retrograde* practice.

A film practice in which one watches oneself watching is reflexive; the act of self-perception, of consciousness *per se*, becomes one of the basic contexts of one's confrontation with work. The process of the production of *film-making*, and the filmic practice of film-viewing *as production*, become interlinked. 'Reflection' does ideological combat with self-consciousness, reflexiveness. To operate thus is to break the dichotomy between feeling and thinking; or rather to break the illusion of their necessary separation and the illusion of their automatic oneness. The filmic enterprise, if such, presents consciousness of film to the self. The radical rejection of the *representation* of consciousness is a main concept.

Film cannot adequately represent consciousness any more than it adequately represents meaning; all film is invisibly encumbered by mystificatory systems and interventions which are distortions, repressions, selections, etc. That a film is not a window to life, to a set of meanings, to a pure state of image/meaning, ought to be self-evident. Thus the documenting of an act of film-making is as illusionist a practice as the documenting of a narrative action (fiction). And consciousness is as encumbered by the illusionist devices of cinema, if one is attempting to document 'it', as anything else. Filmic reflexiveness is the presentation of consciousness to the self, consciousness of the way one deals with the material operations; filmic reflexiveness is forced through cinema's materialist operations of filmic practice.[12]

Self-consciousness, and consciousness *per se,* must in no way imply consciousness as deflecting on to a mythical subject; it must in no way imply transcendence or transcendent subjectivity; it does not set itself up in opposition to real relations, i.e. consciousness as knowledge in opposition to material relations as knowledge. One can see it in schematic '⊤' form, the horizontal being the work upon which functions operate (the film plane), the vertical being 'consciousness', the line to the recipient as his/her necessary mode of inculcated dialectic operation.

Technique

Access to involvement with technique is the formidable basis of all art which poses questions seriously, and which moves forward to new stages of development, the working through of contradiction in its practice. Thus technical innovation is itself ideologically conditioned; in many cases innovations and conceptual entities were not thought through inside a culture, though the apparatus and the actual scientific discoveries were already present. Or 'one crucial element' would wait 200 years to be discovered. The lag between the possibilities for innovatory technical practices (such as camera and photographic printing) and the realisation of such practice (two centuries later)[13] is an ideological one. At the same time, when a new technical practice becomes operative, it bears directly on aesthetic practice (whether it produces that aesthetic practice or is produced by it is a complex matter).

Technique, which is often categorised as separate from aesthetic issues, is in fact inseparable; mass reproduction of photography had considerable influence on the aesthetic possibilities of the mass reproduction of photography, and vice versa. It seems virtually a circular argument, which makes it all the more uncanny that it is so often belied. The aesthetics of silkscreening as it is practised by a Warhol has a not insubstantial relation to the technical fact of silkscreening *and* to the techniques made possible by certain *inventions* and their utilisation at a certain period. In film, the flattening out of space is possible through various devices of camera and this is an involvement with technique that is unavoidably present as the aesthetic basis of the work. In film, also, slow motion is a technical *invention,* inseparable from analytic work on representation. Thus involvement with technique refers to two phenomena: (1) *inventions* which make possible, fulfill, technical needs (and those technical needs are inseparable from the aesthetic which produces them and which they produce); (2) aesthetic *usage,* inseparable from technical possibilities.

Theory and practice

An important problem is the question of continuing and broadening advanced practice without elaborating distinct theory. The filmwork itself is an ideological practice, and in some cases a theoretical practice. Film theory, if such exists, takes the form of written retrospective history which can function as a basis for its own practice (theoretical practice) and/or for the

practice of film-making as it correlates to the theoretical embodied in it. (How it is how it is what it is.) Much formulation taking place at the moment deals with retrograde work but this may be a step towards being equipped to deal adequately with Structural/Materialist film. Adequate work is indeed necessary in film-making and writing 'on' film. A semiotics that is right-wing is not the only one I can envisage, though little else is at the moment forthcoming. One can cite, in support of the above assertion, the lamentably reactionary symbolic interpretation by Roland Barthes of a series of Eisenstein stills.* Such a position needs to be combatted, but so too does Foucault's superb Marxist/Althusserian *interpretation* of, for example, Magritte's retrograde picture-puzzle-gimmicks. What we are stuck with is often advanced theoretical formulation, critically adapted to work which does not warrant it. This results in a *reading into* the work. For such a critical operation, the most reactionary work will suffice because, after all, one can project one's 'personal' wishful thinking into virtually any film. Partaking of the primal scene and 'work on the signifier' seem to be the dominant current malpractices.

> Left to itself, a spontaneous (technical) practice produces only the 'theory' it needs as a means to produce the ends assigned to it; this 'theory' is never more than the reflection of this end, uncriticized, unknown, in its means of realization; that is, it is a by-product of the reflection of the technical practice's end on its means. A 'theory' which does not question the end whose by-product it is remains a prisoner of this end and of the realities which have imposed it as an end. Examples of this are many of the branches of psychology, of sociology, and of Politics, of Economics, of Art, etc . . .
>
> Louis Althusser, *For Marx*

We have, among English advanced film-makers, work which utilises traditional, transparent documentary film-making in an unthought manner, under the guise of Structural/Materialist operation. The use, for example, of black leader cut into a film to be the image of the time when the camera motor was not running is a mystification of the most dangerous sort. That mystification can devise routes back to the apparent point of departure. One then ends up, through this repressive re-routing, at a stage prior to that of the anti-illusionist project. In fact, these mis-routings can lead further back, to the original point of aggression, the stimulus to one's film practice in the first place, i.e. the 'straight' documentary against which the anti-illusionist film is working. In this example, black leader posits a direct representation of time, which in fact it is not. It posits a direct representation of an action, 'camera motor turned off', which it is not. Thus it is a representation which does not present itself. It posits itself as an image of something other than itself, which in

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fact it is not. It posits a gap between two 'realities', i.e. the preceding shot and the following shot, thus attempting to annihilate its *presence* (thus representing and repressing at the same time). Unquestioned in the above operation is the signifying area as well; no investigation, let alone intervention, is undertaken apropos that area. Thus the use of black leader as posited in my example instantiates an illusionist operation which is then covered, or masked.

The demarcations must be drawn all the more strictly when dealing with such work precisely because the rearguard revision it performs is seemingly not obvious. That some films do not in any way posit such rearguard work, though their makers cannot fully articulate their filmic method and practice, is in no way a contradiction in terms. The question of (artistic) intention comes up here, and whether or not that intention can be said to exist precisely by its presence in the work. More often than not, the nonverbalisation of intention is not a sign of the nontranslatability of the specific film practice into words, but rather a mere absence of *correct* verbalisation, which does not deny in those cases the 'absolute' translatability into words of intention. In some few cases, indeed, this is not the case. The root of this question is the mechanistic, simplistic notion that without speech there is no production. It is obvious, nevertheless, that those intentions which are articulated are often not what is in fact operating as inscription in (and of) the work. It is the work one deals with; slight shifts in words, like slight shifts in filmwork operations, can radically alter the position and meaning. These slight shifts, which are in fact major shifts, exist in that untranslatability between the maker's intention as thought in speech, the maker's intention as unthought in speech though capable of being verbalised, the maker's intention as unthought *at all,* the maker's intention as untranslatable into speech, though thought ('I know what I want to do, i.e. in advance and having gone through decision-making processes, but I don't know why, i.e. can't say why') etc.

Anglo/American Structural and Structural/Materialist film has so far failed to attract any attempt at theory. Advanced – mainly French – theory (not necessarily concerning film directly) is either not capable of dealing with film or posits retrograde illusionist, post-Bazinian manifestations of film. With the (at best) nearly total demise of New American Cinema,[14] mainly through its resurgent romanticism or (worst) its continued operation as pseudo-narrative investigations, there remain the few English (plus one Canadian and one Austrian) Structural/Materialist film-makers, who are working to a great extent without the beginnings of a theoretical/historical approach. Consequently, in most cases (at best) these films open up contradictions between theory (not necessarily of film) and the practice of film-making as it embodies theory, i.e. *is theoretical.* That these contradictions are opened up by films which are largely 'unconsciously thought' on the part of the film-makers is another problem.

As to the theoretical practice of film theory, nothing at all seems to have been begun. The derivative material published in *Screen* is merely importation from at most three Paris sources; though at moments useful it is not directed

correctly, is not made to interact with avant-garde film practice in this country (or any other). Operating in a vacuum as far as avant-garde cinema is concerned, it finds itself not coincidentally aligned with dominant cinema, with no production capacity of its own. British avant-garde film since 1966 has not been studied; nor the works of the European avant-garde experimental film of the late 1950s and the 1960s. Witness to this lack of knowledge is the following extract from the absurd 'dialogue' which *Screen* conducted with Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen (no fault of theirs):

> *Screen:* Nevertheless, the importance of language and the way it is used in your film is very different from the kind of irrational, mystic overtones of the Anglo/Saxon avant-gardes, such as Sharits, Wieland, Frampton, and so on. I see your film as closer to a materialist conception of language such as e.g. modern French theories of writing.
> Wollen: That's an absolutely false characterization of those films. For instance, Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma* (1971) is based on mathematical transformations in relation to the alphabet . . .
> *Screen:* Which again comes out of mysticism and Kabbala.
> Wollen: But by that token Kabbalism is also very strong, e.g. in Robbe-Grillet. I would say Kabbalism runs very strongly through all that French thought. You can see how, for instance, Jabès and Jewish thought feeds into Derrida. There is a very strong streak of Kabbalism in *Tel Quel* . . . I see *Zorns Lemma* on the Straub side of the interface rather than the Brakhage side, though it does have a neoplatonist aspect concerning light.
> *Screen:* Maybe we should talk about that some other time.
>
> (*Screen*, Autumn 1974)

More unfortunately, *Screen's* interviewers wrote an introduction ending with the following statement: 'The interview with Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey can be described as polemical in the sense that the ideas discussed in it as well as the film itself (*Penthesilea*) may appear totally aberrant when seen in the context of British film culture at the present time.' Apart from the coy, non-normative use of the word 'aberrant', the statement unmasks the complete repression by *Screen's* editors of the film culture *as it exists.*[15]

Conclusion

Structural/Materialist films are at once object and procedure. Some are clearly, blatantly of a whole, others work as obvious fragments, non-beginning-non-end film. Both rely upon an aesthetic that tries to create didactic works (learning not teaching, i.e. operational productions not reproductive representations). At the same time there is attempted avoidance of empiricism, and the mystic romanticism of higher sensibility individualism. This romantic base of much American Structural film has been elucidated by P. A. Sitney. Visionary film-making is precisely the post-Blakean mire that Structural/Materialism confronts, whether this confrontation is articulated

or not. 'Unconsciously thought' processes define themselves in practice. One must go on after Warhol, not revert to a re-invigorated pre-Warholian stance; one ought to be, by now, tired of *express*ing the same old thing . . . 'trying to express when there is nothing to *express*'. To ignore the ideological function of Sitney's exegesis of a 'new romantic affirmation in recoiling against the tremendously crucial aesthetic attack that Warhol made' is precisely to be embedded in dominant ideology as located in the specific area being discussed: film. (*Film Culture,* Spring 1972, P. A. Sitney.)

The ideological direction of Sitney's arguments is not mentioned here as part of my criticism, since it coincides with the ideological weight of the works he discusses and therefore he becomes in fact the most adequate spokesman for and exegete of the films he deals with, with notable exceptions. (I shall also not attempt to elucidate the dominant ideology here in specific terms.) Structural film became merely another aesthetic mode, another formalism, in fact, with a vague set of rules and self-definitions yet without important function or meaning outside its mere differentiation *per se* from previous modes. I see Structural/Materialist film of course within a materialist function if it is to operate usefully. *Some* such works of Structural/Materialist film are the following: *Little Dog For Roger, Yes No Maybe Maybe Not, Spot the Microdot* (Malcolm LeGrice); *Wavelength, Back and Forth, Central Region* (Michael Snow); *Trees in Autumn, TV, Szondi Test, Auf der Pfaueninsel* (Kurt Kren); *Diagonal* (William Raban); *Adebar, Schwechater* (Peter Kubelka); *Process Red, Zorns Lemma* (Hollis Frampton); the problematic *Erlanger Program. Window Box* (Roger Hammond); *Deck* (Gill Eatherley); *Film No. 1, 'A' Film, Man With a Movie Camera* (David Crosswaite); *Word Movie,* 3 min. section *Razor* in *Fluxus* (Paul Sharits); my own *Clouds, Hall, Room Film 1973; Green Cut Gate* (Fred Drummond).

To make distinctions between works is a matter of clearly contextualising the problematic, and each work's operation within it. Each work must be brought forth to clarity from the multilayered inscriptions that it *is.* Using the term Structural/Materialist is dangerous as well, since it refers to Structural Film. Equal emphasis must be put on the Materialist 'half' of the term (and a dialectical materialism, not a mechanistic materialism, is necessary). The term Structural Film took as basic assumption the contexts of merely three or four works and evolved a thesis from them, works not all of more than minor importance. Perhaps the same can be said at this juncture of my definition of Structural/Materialist film. The 'theory' was meant for more than parochial definition of these (above) works.

One creates a work. One also creates, in varying degrees, a negation of past work, of historically constituted bases for tradition. The Structural/Materialist film and production of meaning in film is the production of *film* itself, in its (thought or 'unthought') theoreticalness and (thought or 'unthought') ideological intervention. To intervene *crucially* in film practice, the 'unthought' must be brought to knowledge, thought. The set of relations between film practice, theoretical practice, and film as theory, can then be brought forth to operate in clarity.

Notes

1. The concept of structure's importance, vis à vis that of representational content, led to the notion of shape taking precedence and confused the issue nearly irreparably. Slight shifts become major theoretical interventions which change the locus of meaning of the work being produced, and the axis along which it operates in time. This is not mere obsessive Talmudic or French academic preoccupation. Althusser's concept of the absolutely essential importance of the correct usage of the word bears remembering; the correct formulation is necessary to close the gap between advanced theoretical practice and the dominance of idealist speech. (Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital,* London, 1970.)

2. By the word film-maker, though, I do not mean to imply that the producer (film-maker) is inserted as mythical figure, as shadow symbol of the 'real', as mirror. Anonymity is indeed a prerequisite; but a superficial anonymity brought into a false existence through such things as 'coldness' – heavy atmospheric intervention – functions precisely as the opposite of its supposed intention. Anonymity must in fact be created through transformation, dialectically posited into the filmic event itself. That is, anonymity must be the result, at a specific instance; it too must be produced rather than illustrated or obliquely 'given' in a poetical sense.

3. This is so because of: associativeness, symbolic reading, integration into the diegesis, subsumation to the dominant illusory system posited, displacement to a mere different level of phantasy-acceptance, poetic shock supportive of the primary story, etc. The signifier and the signified as arbitrary, as artifice, and as less than primary, is the area in which production of 'meaning' must take place. Meaning at this stage must be seen to clearly obtain to Structural/Materialist reading. Yet by collaborating in the current usage of the term *reading* I separate myself from the bourgeois oppression of the dominance of the word while acknowledging its hegemony.

4. In the Japanese theatre, an actor holding a mask in front of his/her face, so that the audience can see the 'real' face behind, is for all that no less identificatory, no less co/optable into the narrative structure and diegetic linearity. The grasping of this example is crucial to the basis for the whole theoreticisation of the problem of narrative. So far all essays on narrative and narrative deconstruction have been mechanistic, derivative of dominant cinema's needs, in inverted form, with no break (epistemological or otherwise). The same goes for all attempts at narrative-deconstructive cinema. It is in order to point to the fact that illustration of a thesis (of deconstruction, or otherwise) in (on) film denies duration, the basic cinematic structure. Illustration *mystifies real filmic relations*; the basic project is thus illusionism, not deconstruction of representational codes, the latter being recuperated as the narrative is constituted.

The latter statement should not be seen to imply naiveté on my part as to the frequent occurrence of so-called non-narrative film which in fact sets up an imagist illusionism, a set of ideological codifications equally manipulatory,

undialectical, identificatory. The system of identification into the imagist code relies heavily on the usage of the imaginary referent, that which is referred to transparently, wherein the medium is not produced as opaque. This system of identification also relies heavily on the repression of the production of the signifier-as-arbitrary, that is, as the strictly ideologically posited coherence artificially manufactured between signifier and signified. As long as these relations are not studied and made to produce work, the illusionist project is not one step further out of its miasmic repressed state.

I must add: when stating that in identification real relations are mystified, I in no way refer to real *relations* in a positivist or empiricist manner.

'For objective dialectics the absolute is also to be found in the relative. The unity, the coincidence, identity, resultant force, of opposites, is conditional, temporary, transitory, and relative.' Lenin, On Dialectics, in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

'Feeling like a voyeur watching Warhol's pornographic *Couch* is precisely *not* to be in the position of a voyeur. It is precisely the *stare* (and the seeming stare of *Wavelength*) that works to counter the identificatory process, though it does not of necessity smash it. And the word *subvert* has become too clichéd and ambiguous to be used effectively in this context. The ineffable stare presents the medium's presence, though positing a deep space centrepoint out from the screen, across from the objects of the film, particularly in *13 Most Beautiful Women* and parts of *Chelsea Girls*.' (London College of Printing Notes on Film, Peter Gidal, 1971.)

5. Aristotelian catharsis is inseparable from identification and the purging (whether this is a pseudo, i.e. unreal, concept or not) is inextricably bound to the latter's operations.

6. In reference to my own work, Michael Snow implies such a constant production rather than consumption. The example is apt because often what seems like (and is, in fact) an untheorised position is of the order of a theoretical supposition. Snow's words: '. . . your film *(Room Film 1973)* had to be worked at. I felt as if it were made by my father, as if it were made by a blind man. I felt that searching tentative quality, that quality of trying to see.' (Michael Snow, Sept. 1973, London.) This attempt at verbalisation, loose as it is, in fact is stating theoretically, beneath the surface, an aesthetic necessitating dialectic attempts at image arrestation, the necessity for production rather than consumption. 'Sometimes the repeating shots would be clear, sometimes one couldn't tell if it was continuous.' The constitution of the work, coming from the material relations of the work, but not mechanistically positioning (i.e. illustrating) itself tautologically, is at the base of the meaning of Snow's statement. Similarly, what seems an aesthete's formalist delight in light in Jonas Mekas' (*Village Voice*, 10 February 1975 and 29 October 1973) and to some extent Lucy Fischer's pieces on my film are really attempts to articulate verbally a problematic of the constitution of the filmic image, opaquely through the agency of light; thus the whole problematic of image-constitution *through* something, a representation as a constitution rather than as a given, 'captured' transparently. This theoretically important difference is thus

elucidated beneath the idealist mask which filmprose in fact mostly is. Fischer is more analytical and less poetic than Mekas. I quote only the former, the quote most apt to be diversionary *without meaning to be so*. 'The rest of the film proceeds with an examination *of* a room and the way that light illumin*ates* the objects *within it*.' (Lucy Fischer, *Soho Weekly News*, 16 January 1975, italics mine.)

According to Lawrence Van Gelder in the *New York Times* (17 January 1975), 'It [*Room Film 1973*] is a murky, granular *journey around* a room, *broken* by occasional *incursions* of light' (italics mine). The ideological concept of journey, a man's journey through a *given* universe, is somehow at the base of the writings on *Room Film 1973*. It is as if all film were (and I suspect this to be the case) still recuperated as some form of masked or not-so-masked documentary rather than a filmic articulation and constituting presence, a filmic production precisely in its operations on the level of the *problematics* of procedure and representation. That the pseudo-documentary is *the* unspoken gap in current film knowledge, in terms of theory, practice and theoretical practice, I have hinted at elsewhere ('Un Cinéma Matérialiste Structural', *L'Art Vivant*, Février 1975, pp. 16–17, as well as *Studio International*, March 1975, '5th Knokke Experimental Film Festival').

7. As to Brecht, there are some illuminating comments from his writings. 'Science isn't so free of superstition. Where knowledge doesn't suffice, faith produces itself, and that is always superstition . . . our lyricists didn't lose their voice because of the book *Capital* but in the face of Capital itself.' 'If Realism *isn't* defined purely formalistically (that which in the 90's was considered Realism, in the realm of the bourgeois novel) then much can be said against techniques like montage, interior monologue, or distancing (*Verfremdung*), only not from the point of view of Realism! . . . as a technical means, the interior monologue (of Joyce) was rejected; one called it formalist. I never understood the reasoning. Just because Tolstoy would have done it differently isn't a reason to reject the way Joyce does it. The objections were constructed so superficially that one got the impression that if Joyce had put the same monologue (Molly Bloom's final one) in the psychoanalytical session, everything would have been all right.' 'Realist, that means consciously influenced by reality, and consciously influencing reality . . . the techniques of Joyce and Döblin are not simply waste products; if one eliminates their influence, instead of modifying it, one ends up merely with the influence of the epigones, such as the Hemingways. The works of Joyce and Döblin betray, in the largest sense, the world-historical contradictions into which the forces of production have fallen vis à vis the relations of production. In the works, productive forces are represented to a certain degree. Socialist writers particularly can learn valuable, highly developed technical means (*Elemente*) from these documents of hopelessness (*Ausweglosigkeit*). *They* see the way out.' 'Perhaps our readers might just *not* feel that they've been given the *key* to events when they, seduced by many wiles (*Künste*) merely take part in (*beteiligen*) the soulful emotions of the heroes.' Bertolt Brecht, *Über den Realismus*, 1938–1940, Suhrkamp Gesammelte Werke (my translation).

Brecht also, of course, wavered from the above views more often than not; though he fought against the formalist notions of Realism which the social(ist) realists conveniently sidetracked, he also wrote often of a 'Realism directly from the standpoint of a class, unfolding the ruling viewpoints as the viewpoints of the ruling, and . . . representing reality, the way it is' (*die Realität wiedergeben*). Brecht's usage of the word representation, of modification, will not be questioned at this point. Correct class position and representation were linked for B.B. For certain film-makers currently working, this is not only *not* a necessary link, it is a vital weak link. The whole platform between two ideological camps within film production rests, finally, on this opposition; it is the overdetermining aspect. The anti-illusionist project is determined, or not, at this juncture.

8. 'Stella's emotional and critical reaction at this time against what he considered rhetorical in the Abstract-Expressionist posture was more marked than the gradual mutation of his style suggests. "I think I had been badly affected by what could be called the romance of Abstract-Expressionism," Stella recalls, "particularly as it filtered out to places like Princeton and around the country, which was the idea of the artist as a terrifically sensitive, everchanging, ever-ambitious person – particularly as described in magazines like *Art News* and *Arts*, which I read religiously. It began to be kind of obvious and . . . terrible, and you began to see through it . . . I began to feel very strongly about finding a way that wasn't so wrapped up in the hullabaloo, or a way of working that you couldn't write about . . . something that was stable, in a sense, something that wasn't constantly a record of your sensitivity, a record of flux." (*Frank Stella*, by William Rubin, MOMA, New York.)

'"I always get into arguments," he reported, "with people who want to retain the 'old values' in painting – the 'humanistic' values that they always find on the canvas. If you pin them down, they always end up asserting that there is something there besides the paint on the canvas. My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen is there . . . If the painting were lean enough, accurate enough, or right enough, you would just be able to look at it. All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion . . . What you see is what you see." (Ibid.) I quote the above with full awareness that the statements broaden the parameters and raise as many confusions as they attempt to close up, yet in relation to the problematical, humanistic, ideology of process, Stella was more aware than most. And this his painting at its best is also clear on.'

9. Michel Foucault in 'On the Subversion of Knowledge', in the interviews with Gilles Deleuze and Paulo Caruso, is particularly illuminating. (Hanser paperback.)

10. For a beginning though also insufficient piece of work on the above mentioned, see my *Beckett & Others & Art: A System* (*Studio International*, November 1974, pp 183–187).

11. Reflexiveness can be as much a diversionary tactic from the anti-illusionist project, as anything. Similarly, the concept of subversion, i.e.

subverting the codes, subverting the meaning, is merely a rationalised annexation of precisely those codes and meanings, with attendant guilt contributing the enormous libidinous energy necessary for this repressive operation. The bourgeois academic cine-semiotician's simplistic usage of psychoanalysis is a ruse.

12. The *self* posited here is situated in its self-alienation/distanciation, though this still refers to the concept, which must be fought, of self as centre (distanced though it be), self as unitary. This psychological centering of the self must be nullified in order to even begin to set up a concept of a dialectically posited distanciated self. Merely to drop the usage of a word such as *self* does not fulfil the requirement of redefining the word. And the redefining must be done so that *self* is understood, not to be a unitary centre of knowledge, an 'I' through which the world is. For the 'I' does not form the world. Consciousness does not form the world. Material relations form the 'I'. The self is merely a clinical word for a cipher.

13. Thomas Neumann, *Sozialgeschichte der Photographie*,Luchterhand 1966.

14. The reactionary basis of most American film-making has only been clarified recently, and this through only the beginnings of analyses which work upon the mystificatory and individualist aesthetics (ethics) of that movement. The English problematic, as I've stated, is a pseudo-documentary production which does not question itself. (See 'On Mike Dunford's *Still Life With Pear*' in '5th Knokke Experimental Film Festival' in *Studio International,* March 1975, p. 138.) 'The European film-makers certainly made a much stronger impression though without the presence of clearly established masters. But that's a way of thinking which many of the Europeans reject . . . It's difficult to pin down, but one senses an attitude towards film-making not as the production of certain great works but as an on-going motive of artistic work . . . European film-makers are wary of the structure and ideology which might create the conditions for cultural imperialism in the area of film-making. They are, therefore, involved in a redefinition of the nature and function of film-making that differs from those of the Americans who are making their way gradually toward the centre of our own culture.' P. A. Sitney, talking with Annette Michelson, 'A Conversation on Knokke and the Independent Film-maker', *Artforum,* May 1975.

The spectre of romantic illusionism and mystique of the individual artist is the reactionary concept of artist as god, artist as magician, artist as purveyor of beauty, artist as fascist.

(a) *The Film-maker.* The film-maker makes the film. It is a source of constant frustration that the illusion is so rigidly upheld that the film-maker produces not (only) the film but him/her self in it. Reception of the film ought to be productive, relational, not consumptive of the invisibly visible artist's character/persona. Even if Peter Gidal films dark rooms what does it say about me except what it says about itself, i.e. handheld consistency and repetitiveness presents procedures on to 'subject matter', dehierarchicalising it, presenting its arbitrariness as against an essentialness; meaning is

(ideologically) produced, not innate. Not a centreframe steadyfocus annexation; constitution/deconstruction, deconstruction/constitution of image through lightness blackness, and annihilation as well through extremes of such . . . The film-maker is specifically not produced in the film, if the film operates on a materialist anti-illusionist level, functioning as a practice – film not literature, dealing *with* illusionism, not inside it. Films that end up being adequate documentaries about the artist (subject's) concerns transparently posit themselves against anti-illusionist cinema.

(b) *Illusion.* A constant illusionist/anti-illusionist procedural operation is not the same as a positing of illusion and questioning its 'reality' in the 'next' shot. True deconstruction (for which the term is not usable) is simultaneous with construction and vice versa.

(c) *Narrative.* Narrative is indeed a strategic category in the investigation of illusion-systems, systems of representation, in the process of representation; but *filmically* this study involves suspension of disbelief. It is this aspect, which is a central base for the whole narrativity-investigation, which is most consistently repressed. This repression overdetermines the whole 'study' of the codes of narrativity, and exposes its essentially reactionary state.

15. I thank Peter Wollen for having brought the issue up in the first place in the interview. I must add that my diatribe is not meant to imply that I subscribe either to Mulvey/Wollen's film or to their views.

I would be untruthful if I did not admit to a wish to have the Journal of the Society for Education in Film and Television deal seriously with current film practice, avant-garde film. The editors do, after all, attempt a Marxist film theory; and, yes, important translations have been published. But anger seems justified when *Screen's* policies and writings are not just ignoring and ignorant, so far, of current film practice in Britain, but in fact extremely aggressive towards it: by innuendo, omission, condescension and concentration on the narrative cinema, thus to some degree sustaining its dominance, at least theoretically. Actual *power* over the cinema-goer none of us has at this stage. It would have been useful in the past if there had been some critical work done; the film-makers also would have found themselves reflecting on their practice to a greater degree. Which can't be bad.

Postscript

I have elaborated, clarified and corrected certain formulations since 1974 when this essay was written. I refer to the following: *Further Footnotes,* London Filmmakers' Co-operative paper, seminar on Practice/Theory, February 1976; *The Anti-Narrative,* Edinburgh Avant-Garde Film Conference, July1976; letter on Ontology, *Screen,* Summer 1976; exchange on *Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film, Afterimage* No. 8, London 1978 (written September 1976); *Technology/Ideology in/through/and Avant-Garde Film,* paper delivered at the 20th Century Studies Conference on The Cinematic Apparatus, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, February 1978.

P.G., January 1978

Abstract Film and Beyond

Malcolm LeGrice

[William] Raban is concerned with the problem of real-time equivalence in the Warhol sense, and has always shown a need to context the compression of time with the actual shooting duration, sometimes including sequences of normal-time shooting as a reference. More recently he has made a number of films which are made in short takes but are edited to include the time between takes as recorded by continuously running sound.

He began to develop this form in *Soft Edge* (1973) where the take length is determined by the wind-down of the clockwork motor of the camera, and the intervening period of rewinding is black; the two sets of images are integrated by a continuous soundtrack. His best work of this kind is *Time Stepping* (1974) where two cameras play a rhythmic space-time game, shooting alternately and panning away in opposite directions down the street from the same central point, two doorways at the front of a row of old houses. The film from both cameras is edited together in the sequence and duration of its shooting, any gaps between the takes being represented by black spacing, and any overlap between the camera runs being represented by superimposition. A second section of the film maintains the parallel between projection and shooting durations. Whilst single frames from the camera are projected in the normal 1/24 second, from the other single-frame one-second time-exposures are stretch-printed to equal their original exposure time. This follows up the exploration of the single-frame time-exposure in another of his films, *Colours of this Time* (1972), where the colour temperature of the light at different times of the day is given its maximum effect on the film's colour emulsion by vastly increasing exposure time while diminishing the light intensity through a dense, neutral-toned filter.

In the systemic films, the determinate quality of the system can lead to a false assumption that all 'content' is controlled by the system. In fact, many assumptions condition the form of the system and how and where it should be applied, and these are as much a source of subjective 'content' as the choice of symbols in a Symbolist work. Determinate systems may create the illusion of eliminating 'subjective' choice whilst all they do is shift the region in which it operates.

It is a recognition of this which has led to more complex notions of procedural determinants which may not be mathematical, mechanistic or

strictly predeterminate. This shift from the systemic to the more responsively procedural is seen for example in Raban's *Time Stepping*. The complexity of the inter-relationship between predetermined strategy, specific limitations and resultant film structure is specifically taken on by Roger Hammond in his *Erlanger Programme* (1971) and *Some Friends* (1973), and by Gidal with great consistency in *Bedroom* (1971), *Room Film 1973* (1973) and *Film Print* (1974). I will take up the Hammond films later in relationship to other questions of film structure because they are less directly related to the camera issue.

Gidal's major contribution comes in his concentration on issues of structuring directly related to the act of perceiving through the camera and the projection of the film. His work in this area represents a complex dialectic between subjective existential response on the one hand, and a reflexive structural concept on the other. His work is procedural in the sense of establishing specific limitations to his action, like the length of film in the camera, the space in which he will work (repeatedly a single room), and the objects which will occupy the space.

His work does not deny his own response to light, surface, or the identity of the object, but it contexts this subjectivity within the recognizable limits of the process. In fact, his handling of camera work, framing, focus and zoom are clearly apparent, indicating his moment-to-moment response to the visual field. However he is not aiming to reconstruct his own motives for the viewer, but to alert them to their reflexive attention in relationship to the 'events' which occur before them on the screen. Such systemic devices which Gidal has used, as in *Room Film 1973* where 100-foot continuous takes are broken down into equal five-second units and each one shown twice, maintaining their original sequence, are concerned with the act of perception, and its various stages of recognition and conception. In it the perceptual stages are deliberately prolonged – an indistinct region of light on the screen will become more distinctly a surface, though not clearly the surface of an object. Then it may take on an edge, but the scale has to be guessed at, being gradually confirmed, denied or neither by the film's subsequent progress. Then it may or may not become recognizable as a book or a shelf, only for the camera to move on to another region – every stage being drawn out by the sometimes nearly indecipherable double view of each segment. Experiences which in our everyday perception are over in an unconscious flash, in Gidal's films become extended processes for conscious attention and structuring.

Unlike other film-makers who have been concerned with a reflexive mode for the audience, Gidal, except perhaps in *Hall,* has never elicited it by the kind of puzzle-game used in Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*. His films have always maintained a distinct link between the act of perception, conception and realization available through viewing the film, and the act of perception and definition of time, space, surface, material and object available through the use of a movie camera. Other film-makers share some of Gidal's reflexive, structural intentions, to whom I shall refer anon, but for the moment I shall continue to consider other developments which spring from a concern with the camera event.

Recently a number of works directly referential to the camera and its functioning have been produced. This development can be seen as part of a general tendency towards a conceptual approach to the processes of filming and projection. Of those films which refer directly to the camera within the work, the most interesting have been by Raban, Gidal, David Crosswaite, Gill Eatherley and Mike Dunford. I have already discussed Raban's *Soft Edge* and *Time Stepping,* but this direction first emerged clearly in Gidal's *Movie No. 1* (1972), where a narrator blandly describes the correlation between film exposure, the rate of motion within the image and the camera's running speed. This is visually demonstrated in two situations, one with a static camera, and a hand switching a table light on and off, the second with a hand-held camera viewing a photograph on a wall.

Crosswaite's *Man with the Movie Camera* (1973) is a particularly elegant film. By mounting a circular mirror a little before the camera, so that it only occupies the central area of the screen, and another mirror to the side, the camera and its cameraman may be seen as the central image, with the other features of the room visible around the circumference. The film is complex in spite of the simplicity of the set-up which is only slowly grasped. Particularly succinct is the way in which the effect of manipulating the camera, like changing focus, is seen in the image simultaneously with a view of how it is brought about. There is no other 'content' than the functioning of the camera itself, seen to be sufficient and even poetic.

In Gill Eatherley's *Dialogue* (1973), two cameras are used to explore the view from a window and then within a room, the camera operators closely follow and complement each other, even frequently observing each other directly. The film traces the two cameras' attempts to imitate each other's action – thus making some of the subjective responses of camera handling more explicit.

A similar intention lies behind some of the recent works of Dunford, *Still Life* (1973), *Deep Space* (1973) and *Arbitrary Limits* (1974). In *Still Life,* movement of the camera around a clearly contrived and strongly lit bowl of fruit is accompanied by a soundtrack giving instructions for the movement, sometimes preceding, sometimes following it. In *Deep Space,* three sections of the film, shot from the same place in a London street, explore distinctly different modes of camera use – the first static on a tripod, the second steady but hand-held, and the third, in violent motion. The fourth section of the film involves a single-frame freeze from the third section of filming. In *Arbitrary Limits* the action of the camera is determined by the physical problem of holding it, unsupported, at arm's length, movements being directly related to muscular fatigue. The soundtrack records the film-maker's comments as he struggles to maintain the position and steadiness of the camera.

In all these films, the action of the camera, its mechanisms and handling are deliberately isolated as a conceptual element in the work.

The next area to consider is that which is concerned with post-camera structuring. Again the range is wide, including systemic procedure in printing as in Mike Leggett's *Shepherd's Bush* (1971), and systematic restructuring

through refilming from the screen as in John Du Cane's *Sign* (1973). It also includes reflexive modes from the deterministic puzzle of Frampton's *Zorns Lemma* (1970), to the provocative tract of Landow's *Institutional Quality* (1969), and the procedurally reflexive work of Gidal and Hammond. In many respects, the historical roots for the systemic approach to editing can be found in Kren's early work, as the reflexive aspect of systemic structure is also first seen in his *TV* of 1968. The systemic or permutative aspects of printing are probably initiated by my own *Reign of the Vampire* (1969) or Crosswaite's *Film No. 1* of the same year.

The roots of the less systemic aspects of reflexive intention are much more difficult to pin down, or even define. Much European work since 1966, particularly that by Kren, the Heins, Weibel, Gidal and myself, has been expressly concerned with eliciting an active, structuring mode in the audience. In America since that time, Snow, Landow, Sharits, Frampton and, in some work, Jacobs, seem to have had similar intentions, though concern with the mode of audience reaction and perception seems only to have been expressed directly in the theoretical writing of European film-makers, frequently viewed as a political as well as an aesthetic issue. This can be seen as a development of Vertov's stance – a politics of perception.

It is in eliciting a conscious, structuring mode in the audience that the systemic direction has most validity, though this can lead to a deterministic form where the mode is simply one of unravelling the nature of the film-maker's particular 'scrambler'. In this case, system tends to replace narrative as an 'involving' device.

The best examples of systemic structure which derives from printing are extensions of the loop-printing concept. With loops of film as the basis, permutative relationships between loops of different kinds of lengths can often be followed through more simply than where material is edited according to system. Again, the problem of narrow determinism applies to work of this kind, the most interesting work not necessarily being defined by the nature of the system applied. Crosswaite's *Film No. 1* explores a simple permutation of travelling-matte loops. The original material of this film is unsplit 8mm film, which results in four images being projected simultaneously when shown in 16mm. The film is printed so that each of the four very simple images changes independently, building up a pattern of rhythmic interchange. As in my loop-permutated *Reign of the Vampire*, appreciation of the system is kinetic and perceptual rather than intellectual; neither film encourages any kind of 'puzzling' out of the system, though it is plain that the film's repetitions have a systemic pattern.

Similarly, the system is not a 'content' to be 'discovered' in Leggett's *Shepherd's Bush*. A loop of film shot from a fast-moving camera, presumably close to the ground, is repeatedly printed, each time with a change in the exposure, so that its visual quality alters in imperceptible stages from totally black to totally white, while the soundtrack, also a continuously repeated pattern, gets lower and lower in pitch. The systemic or structural aspect of this film is again partly directed towards the appreciation of duration through

attention to minimal developments in the image.

Since Jacobs' *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* (1969), and the Heins' *Grün*, a number of film-makers have used refilming from the screen as a means of transforming the image, particularly extending the time of a sequence or exploiting the changes in visual qualities of lighting, resolution and grain as in work by Ernie Gehr.

Du Cane has also made a number of films which begin from a sequence of film shot often in single frames or with a fast-moving camera; then, as in *Sign*, the original material is refilmed from the screen progressively allowing longer and longer attention to the component frames as the sequence is repeated; or, as in *Praxis* (1974), reordering the sequence of shots, like shuffling a pack of cards. A different use of refilming from the screen is not concerned with transforming the image, but is a reference to the act of filming and its relationship to the act of projection, to which I shall return.

In discussing Gidal's *Room Film 1973* I considered the reflexive activity in relationship to a continuous act of perceiving, defining and structuring. For the audience, a process of assessment and prediction seems to be essential to a reflexive concept of cinema. The simplest form of this emerges in the puzzle format, as in Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*, where he exchanges sequences of words arranged in alphabetical order for twenty-four 'action' sequences. Though the film has many levels of aesthetic control, and the nuances of the 'game' are varied, the general implication of the form for the audience is that there is a solution to be worked out, existing, as it were, *a priori* in the work. This conditions the nature of the reflexive behaviour which the audience engages in. A less deterministic mode is brought about in Frampton's more recent *Poetic Justice* (1972), where the film image is no more than the sequential presentation of sheets of a film script, written to demand a conscious structuring or corrected restructuring of the events described in the script with careful, deliberate ambiguity.

In Landow's *Institutional Quality* and *Remedial Reading Comprehension* (1970), the reflexive mode takes on a provocative function. By addressing the audience directly through the film, giving instructions, asking questions or proclaiming blandly 'this is a film about you – not about its maker', it forces the audience to recognize that apparent surface intentions, like the instructions to participate in a way which cannot be complied with, are not the 'subject' of the work. They are a provocative demonstration that the audience must treat a film, however subjectively structured by the film-maker, as raw material for their own use. This is a demand that film should be approached sceptically, counteracting unquestioned acceptance of the film's authority.

Although it is perhaps not incidental, many of the films structured with a reflexive intention make use of words and are didactic in tone. A number of these are concerned with the method of constructing meaning in cinema, questioning the codes as an end in itself. However, other works, which are not systemic, semantic or didactic, can still be considered as reflexively structured. An example is Hammond's *Some Friends*. In this film, he reacts clearly against

the wholist, systemic or problem-solving structure, looking instead for a method of structuring his activity so as to incorporate particular response to his material, and the changes in direction which this might demand.

Also difficult to categorize is the Heins' recent work. The level of experimental work in Germany has fallen off since the late sixties and they have found themselves in relative isolation from other film-makers. Partly as a response to this state of affairs they have engaged upon a general project of consolidation and clarification which they title *Structural Studies*. This is a continuing work which attempts to order and analyse the various concerns and devices of their earlier films. It involves the selection of films for specific qualities, like the examination of apparent movement created by flicker or by frame jitter, depth and motion created by focus or aperture changes, and so on. In some cases new material has been shot to precede films with a simple 'abstract' presentation of the device to follow. The new material takes the form of a simple rectangle or circle exposed to the same filming conditions as the more complex 'live-action' sequence which is shown next. In other cases, the new material is shot to fill gaps where the more systematic research suggests an experiment which needs to be carried out or a demonstration made.

Though they continue to produce work at a very high rate, much of it, like *Stills* (1974) and the growing series of portraits which began with *Manson, Biggs* and *Hein* (all 1970), is outside the stricter confine of the *Structural Studies* project. However it is this general project which represents their most important contribution to the current situation. Though openly academic in intent, the individual works lose nothing as films in their own right. Whilst analytical at one level, each work has a complexity and control of image quality which make it clear that the particular problem selected for attention is only one aspect of the wider meaning of the work. It is a project towards extending clarity about the material and perceptual phenomena of film, but one which realizes the continuing development of the phenomena being studied. The work is perhaps as significant for the 'long-term' attitude which it embodies as for the specific films.

From *Abstract Film and Beyond*,
Studio Vista/M.I.T. Press, 1977

MALCOLM LeGRICE

Yes No Maybe Maybe Not

Peter Gidal

There are two basic sequences. An image of water splashing against a wall or barrier, and a long shot of Battersea power station (with its huge smokestacks, smoke rising out of them). Through precise strategy, which includes, however, elements of chance, Malcolm LeGrice has set up this film. [b/w, silent, 12 mins., 1967.]

The film starts with a negative image of the water superimposed upon the image-positive. Then we see Battersea power station superimposed upon itself (again negative on positive.) Then we come to variations of the power station through a change in synchronization, the negative is held back about four frames, and the sync is lost, creating a space between the negative and the positive. Following this, the water is superimposed upon the Battersea power station, to give us a triple layer of movement. The space between two equal opposite images that are several frames out of sync makes for the effect of bas-relief; also, the separation of two images (one negative, one positive) makes for a line-determined space of grey that varies in shape and tone according to the change of synchronization (moving, that is to say, the negative another 5,6,7,8 frames ahead of the positive). The interplay of *same* images creates the dialectic.

The larger the difference between two 'same' images (negative over positive) the larger the grey in-between shape becomes. Out of the space between two shapes we create a new image. As this new image is the product of the space usually considered a negative area formed by the separation of a negative and a positive image-layer, one cannot immediately grasp hold of the precise situation when watching it. To add to this, the second image, of Battersea power station, involves itself to the same triple extent. The intermittent negative shapes formed (negative not in film terms but in terms of the leftover space created by the separation of two shapes, either on negative or on positive filmstock) are defined by line. The image of foreground and background becomes reversed, and through the abstraction process we lose sight of 3D space representation. Here the illusion is one that can be visually clarified. As we focus on a certain space, we become aware of the process of separation of image, and cannot help but react to this impulse. The process-viewing itself *is*

the content of this film. This becomes apparent. The film consists primarily of a 30ft. (50 second) sequence of the water, and a 25ft. sequence of Battersea power station. After LeGrice (who printed this film himself in the labs) came to the end of each section, he would start over with the same piece of material. The images themselves are not found images. They were filmed by LeGrice to be used specifically for the film. They are *not* chosen images that serve a purpose in terms of any specific meaning prior (or anterior) to the film. The play of the horizontal waves crashing repeatedly against the barrier, together with the vertical chimney, makes for a complex (therefore intense) image in its own right.

The repetition in this film points to an obsessiveness. When the waves hit the barrier, again and again, with varying areas of intermittent shape formed by the negative/positive image, we are led on to a path of studiously becoming involved with precision of vision and nuance of change. The loop-effect, which can never be securely ascertained, makes for a gap in our knowledge: we do not know whether the splash of waves is a repeat of the splash two seconds previously. Is it similar, or is it the same? We become deeply involved in *watching*. We attempt to relate the negative image space to the positive image beneath it, or *next* to it, as it seems in the final marrying of the two sections. Film does, after all, consist of a combination of illusionistic three-dimensional space and two-dimensional 'abstract' space, and this film makes the most sophisticated use of both.

The obsessive repetition of image as question/answer dialectic is shown as part of the intention in the title of the film. This thought-process, the internalized dialectic with the self, the posing of question and anti-question towards 'maybe not' rather than an affirmative is clearly a preoccupation for LeGrice. Together with the other elements and in terms of inculcated response and visualization, this approach has found its purest formation in this film. It is a masterly example of the perfection of which this idiom is capable.

Journal of the Royal College of Art, London (*Ark*),
Spring, 1970 (corrected 1974)

On Malcolm LeGrice

Gordon Gow

A matter of dominant concern to Malcolm LeGrice is the 'unlinkable gap' between narrative-and-thematic structures and the abstract factors of cinema. This concern is reflected in his experimental short films, which owe much to the versatility of the printing equipment used by the London Film Makers Co-operative. Watching a work by LeGrice is an exercise for the senses and for the mind. He tends to place negative as well as positive images before us, sometimes with several projections running simultaneously, duplicating and superimposing elements already seen but recurring in varied permutations. He will inform an audience politely that his *Spot the Microdot* is not intended as a kind of assault: it might seem like that to some, but this is purely accidental. The purpose is to 'explore the perceptual situation you are in while you are looking at the film'. One steels oneself, unnecessarily. Is this going to be the kind of stuff they describe at the NFT as 'not for the squeamish'? Well, no. It is a bright circle of white light, blinking in the blackness – an image without a frame, pulsating in a predestined rhythm. The white light comes and goes, its after-image lingering as if one had blinked tightly against a sudden emergence of hot sun from behind a cloud. By degrees, colour is employed as well, and almost subliminal imagery within the circle. Perception is of the essence.

LeGrice intends the spectator to consider 'how the eye works, and how the mind builds up a perpetual rhythmic structure'. In an earlier film, *Castle One*, he used documentary material about the 'surface' of industrial and political matters, but more consequentially he placed a light bulb in the auditorium. During the projection, the bulb flashed on and off: 'This was a Brechtian device to make the spectator aware of himself. I don't like to think of an audience in the mass, but of the individual observer and his behaviour. What he goes through while he watches is what the film is about. I'm interested in the way the individual constructs variety from his perceptual intake.'

To provide the intake we receive from *Spot the Microdot*, LeGrice used 16mm magnetic emulsion film, the sort which is generally employed for laying 16mm soundtracks. It is fully opaque, therefore no light from the projector can penetrate it, which is why there is no indication of the customary frame. The circle of light, coming and going, is achieved by punching holes in the film itself: 'I made up a series of varying distances, exploring mathematical systems, and through the holes the beam of light from the projector shines

directly on to the screen for a twenty-fourth of a second at a time.'

Although LeGrice affirms that the film-maker can 'build up associative structures' – as indeed he does – the effect of *Spot the Microdot* upon me was not in the least suggestive of the torture chamber. When the white circle of light turned red, one individual in our midst gave forth a sound which I took to be ecstatic. Whatever it signified, it meant at least that somebody was reacting as a separate entity, regardless of the audience or group. The silent remainder, including myself, were no doubt doing likewise – personally, I never do anything else: in a packed auditorium I am perfectly capable of keeping a straight face if I am not amused, even while those around me roar with laughter, and conversely I have been known to chuckle audibly if I find something funny in a film, despite the fact that everybody else is wrapped in serious silence – or possibly sleep. So LeGrice has me on his side immediately when he begins to speak in favour of the individual response.

'I have a thing about crowds,' he says. 'I have a distaste for a lot of people thinking the same thoughts. I dislike the idea of a large gathering where two or three people stand on a raised platform and have access to microphones.' Something of this feeling might be discerned in *Lucky Pigs*, which LeGrice made on the Co-op's printer by combining a loop of his opaque film (with the punched holes) and another loop of selected images which come and go within the circles in multiple projections side by side. Genuine pigs appear, for example, grovelling around mindlessly. Humans are seen moving, equally mindlessly it would seem, on a dance floor. Others are observed from outside the windows of their dwellings, apparently cooped up – and so forth. What struck me, individually, was the hint that the pigs in their animal state were luckier perhaps than humans who had relinquished something of their own personal identities by conforming to the group experience in the dance hall and the humdrum life style of the crowded apartment building. LeGrice said this was interesting: an example, to his mind, of the transformation of experience and the way an observer 'creates a meaning'. Being occupied so much with the abstract, he is not dogmatic about the cerebral interpretation of his work. 'When I called it *Lucky Pigs*, I was aware of a possible interpretation – a trite semantic reference – the present symbolic connotation of pigs with the police.

'Our peripheral nervous systems, at the automatic level, operate on a different plane from our associative functions. We can impose our awareness of one upon the other. So this makes the abstract elements useable, in a flexible way, within the semantic structure. In *Castle Two* I had threatening images – a hovercraft, for example – which were photographed in the daytime and were therefore light, while the sensuous images were dark. There was no reason why this should be so. But it is possible to create associations.'

On the other hand, *Your Lips*, despite its title, is wholly abstract: a series of oval graphics, constantly widening and growing more complex as a loop superimposes upon itself in what LeGrice defines as a means of exploring time-perception. This one was made by computer, programmed by LeGrice at the Atlas Computer laboratory in Chilton, Berkshire. 'This produces a

magnetic computer tape which is put into a small computer linked to a cathode ray tube, over which is placed a 16mm camera. The tape controls the output on to the tube, and the progression of the film in the camera – untouched by hand.'

Aspects of these films are combined in *Reign of the Vampire*: 'made from six loops in pairs, by printing two loops together rather than in two runs following each other. The effect is largely to eliminate the transparent aspect of superimposition. It is a kind of on-going under-consciousness which repeats, and does not resolve into any semantic consequence. One of the factors of the use of the loop, which interests me particularly, is the way the viewer's awareness undergoes a gradual transformation from the semantic-associative to the abstract-formal, even though the *information* undergoes only limited change.'

An influence upon these ideas was LeGrice's first viewing of Eisenstein's *Strike*. 'I was interested in my own reaction to the sequence where hoses are turned on to hold people back. This is established in a narrative way and then, ironically, the beautiful abstract imagery of the water, going in all directions like fountains, gets you twisted between fact (or semantics) and an appreciation of the abstract elements.' This is not an uncommon reaction to almost any Eisenstein film. His use of the medium can be studied with detachment from the narrative significance because so much of the acting, especially as far back as 1924 when *Strike* was made, is too theatrical for its realist purpose. While he chose good and credible faces, their contortions in the close-ups are more akin to the stage than to the intimacy of cinema. The emotive value resides very much in composition and his famous juxtapositions in the cutting room. One can understand that the impact of *Strike* might well have seemed very realistic when it was new. Today it is still useful as formative technique, but more readily admired for its abstract qualities than for its illusions of actuality.

A resistance to cinema as abstract art is part of our conditioning – our anxious urge to comprehend a meaning. In *Berlin Horse*, LeGrice has arrived at a mirror-like imagery in dual projections of a horse moving and weaving within the frame in both negative and positive prints which are eventually heightened by the use of colour filters. The title is utilitarian: the horse was photographed in Berlin – not the well-known city, but a village of the same name which is near Hamburg. The original shooting in 8mm. was refilmed in 16mm, and the outcome leaves LeGrice himself 'uncertain about what it implies, and also about its decorative qualities'. This element of self-questioning is indigenous to his work, leading on to the further questions that each spectator must ask himself. Undoubtedly the tired or submissive mind, long accustomed to being told a story with a beginning and a middle and an end, or even compliant to the didactic schools of film-study which tend at times to instruct the individual so rigorously as to tell him what he is supposed to think, will be perplexed by the freedom of interpretation that LeGrice permits. This is exploratory work, for the film-maker himself and for the spectator as well.

On Malcolm LeGrice

Jonas Mekas

Malcolm LeGrice's 'White Field Duration' (20 minutes) is one of the important works I saw in London. I have also to state here clearly that I find Malcolm LeGrice by far the most important film artist working today in England, or maybe even in Europe. His work is serious, inspired and inspiring, original, and very very beautiful. His work is formal and direct and deals with the basic capabilities of cinema. Almost all of it is in the multiple projection area and I think he's the most important artist who has worked with multiple projections yet. This particular piece is two-'screen' projection. The first five minutes the screens are practically clear white. During the next five minutes we begin to see tiny, unimposing scratches moving across the screens. The scratches obviously were placed there, but they also could be taken for dust by some. For the next five minutes or so both screens flicker lightly and softly and there are images ('screens') of different grey (white) intensities within the larger images (or screens). During the last five minutes or so slight traces of some representational imagery begin to be barely visible on both screens, and then the screens blank out again. It is a very pure, a very classical piece.

Since LeGrice is a major artist working in the film medium today and since his work is not known in New York, I'll give space to LeGrice himself to speak about some of his ideas:

'All of my work as a film-maker, except for one or two films, has involved non-standard projection facilities, the simplest of which has been double projection, 16mm, side-by-side. This inconvenience of method intention has meant that most of my work is not easily distributed or screened, and I have had to present almost all of the shows of my work, travelling with it and organizing the machinery. There is in this probably some partially conscious motive, the films determining that I must be present at their screening. I have become increasingly concerned with the actuality of the projection situation (the only tangible point of existential reality for the audience), making it the PRIMARY basis of experience and meaning. It has occurred to me that it is useful to distinguish between an epistemological, and a phenomenological approach to film (though both concepts must be understood as linguistic contrivances with strictly limited application to EXPERIENCE, far more complex than is available to the convenience of verbal categorization). Epistemological concern leads to the use of models/concepts derived from

linguistics, and the attempt to isolate out codes and their elements (Metz). The problem with this approach is that it relies on (or encourages, in spite of some disclaimers by Metz) the acceptance of the historic cinematic culture as its basis for analysis. The rejection of almost all aspects of the prevalent cinematic culture by myself and most of the current avant-garde, post-underground film-makers, has made the phenomenological alternative more attractive. In a sense, the re-invention of cinema from SCRATCH . . . or at least from celluloid, projector lamp, light, screen, duration, shadow, emulsion, and scratch. The two alternatives are not in fact exclusive: there can be an epistemological approach to the modulations from the phenomenological base . . . however, I am not interested in an academic "understanding", which I view as a subtle means for the destruction of experience and consideration. I am only interested in the PROCESS of action-on (making) and the PROCESS of active experience in relationship-to (viewing). Both are ongoing and in constant flux, the meaning or effect of a work undergoing constant modification (and constantly modifying), in its passage through the world. The notion of "fixity of meaning" for a work, somehow held within it as an essence, is an illusion encouraged by our cultural habits of passive awareness. I am interested in transformation, the modes and qualities thereof, and in creation – the bringing about of unpredictable events which existed nowhere before their realization."

The Village Voice, 27 September 1973

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Malcolm LeGrice, on whose work I wrote extensively in my report from London last September, was in New York and presented his work at Millennium April 20 and 21.

LeGrice's work in cinema ranges from 'straight' one-screen one-projector films to multiple screen projections which he calls 'durations' and which he projects for specific time lengths, to multiple screen projections which he calls 'installations' and which he projects for unlimited time lengths, usually in gallery situations, and to structural and conceptional live participation pieces.

Whatever the form, all his work seems to focus on the self-referential aspects of cinema, on the tools, the materials, and the processes of cinema. This, of course, was explored in this country extensively from 1960 to 1965. But LeGrice looks at it all from the formal, post-structural perspective. Take, for instance, the projector. One of the earliest instances where the projector was brought into action and I still remember it vividly, was Ray Wisniewski's performance with the hand-held projectors at the old Cinematheque. He used the projectors the way an action painter might use his brushes. LeGrice uses them very formally and very intellectually in order to gain different image and screen structures during the projection. He uses screens the same way. If George Landow could be credited for exploring the 'thingness' of the film strip

itself, so LeGrice is using the properties of the screen and the properties of the projector more intensively and more dynamically than anyone else I know – with, of course, the obvious and unique exception of Harry Smith. LeGrice, like Harry Smith in his early projections, uses the single, regular shape screen image only as the beginning point, the beginning norm. From there on he builds and weaves with multiple screen structures which contract and expand to all four sides; or they overlap, or they work together to produce dynamic – usually colour field – images.

Even when LeGrice uses images taken from life, his films do not betray any memory, and employ a minimum of illusion. It's all structure, all very abstract, all centering on the process of making the images that we see, on the tools, materials, the components. It is an abstract cinema, no doubt – but it makes for a very sensual experience. It is sensual in the sense that we experience light and materials that are very sensuous – at least they are so to me. For instance, I find few sounds that I've heard in my life to contain more sensuous sonority than the sound of the six 16mm projectors running simultaneously, loaded with loops. I listened to the sound, and it was like the ocean, and it was like rain splashing on the roof, and it was like wind in leaves, and it was like six projectors running with six loops. The sound was deep, rich, full, very pleasant, very sensuous, and very good for the mind and for the body.

Anyway, LeGrice came and went, and I hope he'll be back again, because his work deals with important aesthetic issues, deals vitally with film language, and should be widely seen. On the other hand, the only way to really see and experience his work is to see Malcolm LeGrice himself, doing it all. That makes him less packageable than film artists who can simply ship their films to you – but not much less so than, say, the work of Jasper Johns (to whom LeGrice pays tribute as one of his early inspirations), whose work must be first assembled in order to be presented in a one-man show and thus can only be in one place at any given time, and not in two places. There are other film artists whose work can be really seen and experienced only with the artist present, and thus are neither packageable nor exportable. I have in mind artists like Jack Smith or Jerry Joffen.

The Village Voice, 2 May 1974

Ten Questions to Michael Snow

Simon Hartog

He wants to make 'a film that has no explanation'.

1. Why Wavelength?

Critical moment in my life and/or art. Light and sound waves. Limits of hear and see . . . 'A time monument'. A pun on the room length zoom to the photo of waves (sea), through the light waves and on the sound waves. Electricity. Ontology. 'A definitive statement of pure film space and time . . .' 'A summation of my nervous system, religious inklings and aesthetic ideas . . .' The quotes from pre-prize piece written for the NY Co-op catalogue.

2. Why is it 46 minutes long?

Nice fuck. Could have been longer, couldn't be shorter. Money! Much shorter and the movement would have been too fast. Much longer was too expensive.

3. What is it about?

It is about question one. Yes. Question one. Also question two, four, five, six and seven. And question three perhaps most.

4. Why does life enter the film?

Life is in the film. One of the subjects of the film or perhaps more accurately what the film *is* is a 'balancing' of different orders, classes of events and protagonists. The image of the yellow chair has as much 'value' in its own world as the girl closing the window. In life(?)thefilmevents are not hierarchical but there is a kind of scale of mobility that runs from pure light events, the various perceptions of the room, to the images of human beings. The inert: the bookcase that gets carried in, the corpse, visually, dying being a passage from activity to object. Inertia. It is precise that 'events *take place*'.

5. Aren't the beginning and the end arbitrary?

They are the beginning and the end of the film. And in between? Where do you start? If you decide to make a film at all that narrows down your choices

considerably. Of course it could have been shot somewhere else. From the beginning the end is a factor. In the context of the film the end is not 'arbitrary'; it is fated. And past the end it should have ripples. The wave photograph; waves are the visible registrar of invisible forces. Because it is (at first) seen as flat (on the wall) it makes a total spatial ending for the film at the same time as an image it implies continuity.

6. What determined your choice of the different textures?

I presume you mean the colour and light-value changes. They were given their tendency by the arranging of the different kinds of film stock which was done before shooting. Basically I played/improvised with plastics and filters while shooting, bearing in mind many considerations, such as their relationship to the human images, their 'abstractness', though their passages of complementaries as a general form they go from warm colours to cool. Spectrum. Oppositions are drama. I didn't always make a 'choice'. I was surprised and wanted to be. However I set up a system or container which could both shape the fortuitous and give it a place. I wouldn't make works of art if I knew, etc.

7. How does the sound track function?

Like the image, the sound starts as 'representational', 'realistic', when the image becomes 'abstract' (negative sequence) that is, one does not 'believe' in the image in the 'real' way, the sound also becomes 'abstract'. These terms are reversible. The sine-wave *glissando* is 'realer' than the other. One does not have the 'feeling' of being in some other place (dream-drug aspect of film). It is 'concrete' while, for example, *Strawberry Fields* on the radio, in the film is already a quote of a quote of a quote, etc. This *glissando* is all the sound we can hear. What else is there? It's meant to be an ear equivalent of the zoom. I think of all the sounds as music and compose in that way. The sound of glass breaking, etc. against the sine-wave before the-man-who-dies enters is very beautiful to me.

8. How did you get there?

Have been working on it for all of my lives.

9. Where do you go after?

I'm going to Edinburgh on Tuesday.

10. What would you say to the spectator who, after a few minutes, wants to walk out?

I might be interested in his or her reasons. It might be interesting to discuss them. It might lead to friendship or sexual intercourse or both. I would hope that he or she would not disturb the others, some of whom presumably might wish to stay.

Cinim No. 3, Spring 1969

Toward Snow

Annette Michelson

The working of his thought is thus concerned with that slow transformation of the notion of space which, beginning as a vacuum chamber, as an isotropic volume, gradually became a system inseparable from the matter it contains and from time.
—Paul Valéry, *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci*

My eye, tuning towards the imaginary, will go to any wavelengths for its sights.
—Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*

There is a metaphor recurrent in contemporary discourse on the nature of consciousness: that of cinema. And there are cinematic works which present themselves as analogues of consciousness in its constitutive and reflexive modes, as though inquiry into the nature and processes of experience had found in this century's art form, a striking, a uniquely direct presentational mode. The illusionism of the new, temporal art reflects and occasions reflection upon, the conditions of knowledge; it facilitates a critical focus upon the immediacy of experience in the flow of time. Thus Aron Gurwitsch, on the origins of this inquiry: 'Hume expressly likens consciousness to a theatre, but it is, so to speak, a theatre without a stage. In modern terminology one could compare consciousness with a perpetual succession of kinematographic pictures . . . a unidimensional sphere of being, whose fundamental structure consists only and exclusively in temporality.'[1] And Gérard Granel, discussing its modern developments: 'Phenomenology is an attempt to film, in slow motion, that which has been, owing to the manner in which it is seen in natural speed, not absolutely unseen, but missed, subject to oversight. It attempts, slowly and calmly, to draw closer to that original intensity which is not given in appearance, but from which things and processes do, nevertheless, in turn proceed.'[2] Epistemological inquiry and cinematic experience converge, as it were, in reciprocal mimesis.

There are, in the history of film, a very few artists whose work, in its radical purity and incisiveness, strikes one as paradigmatic in this respect. Among

them is Michael Snow, whose *Wavelength*, some four years old, is now a celebrated film, a turning point for many in the history of the medium as in the maker's own development. It was once described in this review by Manny Farber, distinguished for the accuracy of his insights, the vigour of his style and the firmness of his allegiance to the tradition of American action film, as 'a pure, tough forty-five minutes that may become *The Birth of a Nation* in Underground films . . . a straightforward document of a room in which a dozen businesses have lived and gone bankrupt.[3] And indeed, the film does seem to be, among other things, just that – which is to say 'that' observation strikes one as 'just' and accurate – conveying, however, an insight which, in some fifteen successive viewings and considerable reflection on the film, had never at any time occurred to me. I will wish to examine briefly and to account for both the accuracy and the surprise of that remark. But here, to begin with, is Snow's description of his film, prepared for the 1967 International Experimental Film Festival of Knokke-le-Zoute in which it took first prize.

> *Wavelength* was shot in one week Dec. '66 preceded by a year of notes, shots, mutterings. It was edited and first print seen in May '67. I wanted to make a summation of my nervous system, religious inklings and esthetic ideas. I was thinking of, planning for, a time monument in which the beauty and sadness of equivalence would be celebrated, thinking of trying to make a definitive statement of pure film space and time, a balancing of 'illusion' and 'fact', all about seeing. The space starts at the camera's (spectator's) eye, is in the air, then is on the screen, then is within the screen (the mind).
>
> The film is a continuous zoom which takes 45 minutes to go from its widest field to its smallest and final field. It was shot with a fixed camera from one end of an 80 foot loft, shooting the other end, a row of windows and the street. This, the setting and the action which takes place there are cosmically equivalent. The room (and the zoom) are interrupted by 4 human events including a death. The sound on these occasions is sync sound, music and speech, occurring simultaneously with an electronic sound, a sine wave, which goes from its lowest (50 cycles per second) note to its highest (12000 c.p.s.) in 40 minutes. It is a total glissando and a dispersed spectrum which attempts to utilize the gifts of both prophecy and memory which only film and music have to offer.

Among details one would want to add to that description would be the quality of the 'human events', their somewhat scattered, random aspect. They take place abruptly, are discrete with respect to one another, are played in a range which runs from the strongly distanced and flat to the conventionally mimetic, linked in some suggestion of causality by only a few lines of dialogue. Secondly, there is the occurrence, through the film, of colour flashes in a range of extraordinary intensity, of sudden changes of the field from positive to negative, of superimposition of fixed images over the progressive zoom, itself

by no means absolutely steady, but proceeding in a slight visible stammer. The superimpositions and stammer function as a sort of visual obbligato, as does the evidence of splice marks, the use of varying film stocks, creating within the movement forward, a succession of fixed or still moments. Then there is the precise nature of the visual field in focus: it is, as we have said, the far end of a loft, opening through windows onto a street whose signs, sounds, traffic and traffic lights are perceptible to us beyond the tall, rectangular windows which are each in turn composed of eight small rectangular panes. The perception of wall, of window, of street will be modified in clarity by colour, by superimposition, as the crescendo of the sine wave will modify our perception of the sound within and beyond the loft. The camera's movement is, of course, beginning to slowly reduce and re-define the visual field, and as we ever so slowly move closer to the wall, we begin to perceive – or rather to sense – two things: first, the presence of some other, rectangular objects on the central panel of the wall (they are as yet only perceptible as small rectangular surfaces) and then, as well (though the temporal threshold of this perception will vary with the viewer), the destination of the camera. Or rather, we sense the fact that it *has* a destination, that its movement will terminate inexorably in a focussing upon a particular area not yet known to us. The camera, in the movement of its zoom, installs within the viewer a threshold of tension, of expectation; within one the feeling forms that this area will be coincident with a given section of the wall, with a pane of the window, or perhaps – in fact, most probably – with one of the rectangular surfaces punctuating the wall's central panel and which seems at this distance to bear images, as yet undecipherable.

Now the effect of these perceptions is to present the movement forward as a flow which bears in its wake, contains, discrete events: their discreteness articulates an allusion to the separate frames out of which persistence of vision organizes cinematic illusion. Above all, however, they create, through the slow focussing in time, through relentless directionality, that regard for the future which forms an horizon of expectation. We are proceeding from uncertainty to certainty, as our camera narrows its field, arousing and then resolving our tension of puzzlement as to its ultimate destination, describing, in the splendid purity of its one, slow movement, the notion of the 'horizon' characteristic of every subjective process and fundamental as a trait of intentionality. That steady movement forward, with its superimposition, its events passing into the field from behind the camera and back again beyond it, figures the view that 'to every perception there always belongs a horizon of the past, as a potentiality of recollections that can be awakened; and to every recollection there belongs as a horizon, the continuous intervening intentionality of possible recollections (to be actualized on my initiative, actively), up to the actual Now of perception'.[4] And as the camera continues to move steadily forward, building a tension that grows in direct ratio to the reduction of the field, we recognize, with some surprise, those horizons as defining the contours of narrative, of that narrative form animated by distended temporality, turning upon cognition, towards revelation. Waiting

for an issue, we are 'suspended' towards resolution. And it is as if by emptying the space of his film (dramatically, through extreme distancing, visually by presenting it as mere volume, the 'scene' of pure movement in time), Snow has re-defined filmic space as that of action. The eye investigates the length of the loft, moves towards that conclusion which is a fixed point; in its movement toward that point, alternative conclusions and false 'clues' have been eliminated, as street signs and movement and certain objects pass from view. The camera reaches the object of its trajectory. That object is indeed another surface, a photograph of the sea. The view is held, as the sound mounts to its highest intensity, splitting off from itself, doubling, sliding up and down the range of cycles as the photograph is re-projected in superimposition upon itself. The eye is projected through a photograph out beyond the wall and screen into a limitless space. The film is the projection of a grand reduction; its 'plot' is the tracing of spatio-temporal *données,* its 'action' the movement of the camera as the movement of consciousness.

The film is a masterwork, a claim hardly to be seriously contested at this point in film history, and though we have strayed some distance from Farber's observations, we are now in a position to consider them more clearly and to see their very real interest. Indeed, for someone so deeply and exclusively committed to the film of tight narrative structure, *Wavelength* could, above all other films from the American avant-garde, present something both new and familiar, welcome, in any case – *if* one understands the continuity of the zoom action to stand as a kind of quintessential instance of that spatio-temporal continuity subtending the narrative integrity of those comedies, westerns, gangster films which formed the substance of the Hollywood tradition, and the object of Farber's delight and lifelong critical attention. Or to put it another way: Snow's work came at a time in the history of the American avant-garde when the assertive editing, super-imposition, the insistence on the presence of the film-maker behind the moving, hand-held instrument, the resulting disjunctive, gestural *facture* had conduced to destroy that spatio-temporal continuity which had sustained narrative convention.

The entire tradition of the independently made film, from Deren and Anger through Brakhage, had been developed as an extension, in American terms, of an avant-gardist position of the twenties in Europe, distending the continuity, negating the tension of narrative. Grounded in the experience of Surrealism and of Expressionism, its will to destroy narrative was an attempt to situate film in a kind of perpetual Present, one image or sequence succeeding another in rapid disjunction, tending, ultimately in the furious pace of single-frame construction, to devour or eliminate expectation as a dimension of cinematic experience. The disjunctiveness of that perpetual Now can be seen, at its most intense, in both the work and the theoretical writings of Stan Brakhage. As film-maker and theoretician, Brakhage is concerned with the primacy of a kind of quintessential vision, innocent, uncorrupted by the conventions of a perspective inherited from the Renaissance and built into the very lens of the camera. With that Platonically inflected terminology characteristic of the Expressionist sensibility, this vision is described in the writings as truer, finer,

higher, in that it is the direct visible projection of inner or 'inward sight'; it is, in fact, presented as a 'closed eye' vision, the inner vision projected through the eye. Reading Brakhage, and especially when watching the films, one recognizes the images in question as tending towards both the intimacy and elusiveness of those we know as 'hypnagogic', those experienced in the half-waking state. Like the hypnagogic image, the Brakhage image, 'truer than nature', does seem situated inside the eye. It aspires to present itself perceptually, all at once, to resist observation and cognition.

Alain, in the *Système des Beaux-Arts,* defines anyone entertaining an hypnagogic image of the Pantheon to count the number of columns of the facade in the image. For the hypnagogic is immediate, appears all at once, disappears all at once, does not fade into appearance or out of view; it is not subject to the laws of perception – to those of perspective for instance. It has the property of exciting attention and perception. 'I see something but what I see *is* nothing.'[5]

Such indeed is the state toward which the style, the rhythm, the cutting and lighting of Brakhage's films tended. In the great works of his maturity, in the *Songs, The Art of Vision, Anticipation of the Night, Fire of Waters,* among others, there is no time, nor room, as it were, for expectation; the spatial *données* are obscured or fractured by spasmodic movement, by painting upon film, by speed; continuity is rhythmic, postulated on the metaphoric syntheses elicited in the viewer by cutting from one image to the next. *Wavelength,* then, in a very special sense was an 'eye-opener', as distinguished from both the hypnagogic vision of Brakhage and the stare of Warhol. Snow, in re-introducing expectation as the core of film form, redefines space as being what Klee, in fact, had claimed it was: essentially 'a temporal notion'. *Voiding the film of the metaphoric proclivity of montage, Snow created a grand metaphor for narrative form.* The consequences are still incalculable; Snow's example and influence, intensified through subsequent work, in film as in other media, acknowledged and unacknowledged, are among the strongest factors in a current situation of the most extraordinary interest. Together with the films of Frampton, Jacobs, Gehr, Wieland, Landow, and largely influential upon them, Snow's work defined a new level of cinematic endeavour, opened a new era in the evolution of cinematic style. This, I do believe, explains the manner in which it could unite, in attention and fascination, critical opinion of a great many kinds and normally divergent. Snow, in restoring the space of 'action' through a sustained, firm and relentless investigation of the modes of filmic presentation, created a paradigm, transcended the a *priori* distinctions between the 'linear' and the 'vertical', the 'prose' and 'poetic' forms, the 'realist' and 'mythopoeic', the 'vertical' and 'horizontal', the styles of continuity and of montage which had animated the film theory and polemics of the past forty years or so.

The paradox which turns upon the creation of a grand metaphor from the elimination of the metaphoric function of montage is by no means unique in Snow's work. One might say that all of the films of the mature period are animated by a central visual or perceptual paradox. *One Second in Montreal* is

a cinematic construction which plays upon the seriality of film images. A succession of still photographs, representing park sites for a projected monument in the city of Montreal under winter snow, is the film. Each unit is held progressively longer as we approach the centre, and the pace speeds up again as the film comes to its end, forcing upon the spectator the consciousness of time as duration – precise but unmeasurable, expanding and contracting in the act of attention to detail, the acceleration producing a curious effect of structural contraction. But the central paradox involves the presentation of still photographs in film and the still more curious impression that, despite the fixity and discreteness of each image, we are involved in a filmic experience, rather than a slide projection. Classical experiments in cinematic perception do instruct us that the projection of a photograph of a place or object and that of the place or object as filmed do not produce the same visual effect. The flow of time is somehow inscribed in the filmic image, immediately given, perceptible in our experience of it. That inscription remained to be articulated. Snow seizes upon it, projecting the photographic still cinematically, so that the flow of time is superimposed, inscribed upon the projection of the photograph's fixity – as the discrete images of the loft had been superimposed upon its traversal by the zoom.

In ←----→ he isolates the panning movement of the camera and in acceleration of that movement carves out a kind of sculptural segment of its projected space (that of a classroom, as against a loft), producing the impression of a flatness and pure directionality which negate its visual depth and incident. The film, proceeding, as in *Wavelength* and *One Second In Montreal*, through temporal acceleration, does, as it speeds up, convert a haptically defined space into an optical one, returning, in a *ritardando*, from the projection of a space flattened by that speed into a plane parallel to the screen's surface, back to the projection of room space. The film holds in balance those two degrees of visual illusion. As in *Wavelength*, the human events (a class in session, a sweeping, a cop peering through a window, men sparring with one another) are, so to speak, contained, as discrete units within the rhythmic structure of the film, at variance with it, and though these events (the passing of a ball back and forth, the sweeping, etc., the appearance of the title sign upon the blackboard) echo the panning movement of the camera, they punctuate rather than structure the action of the film. In general, the effect is one of succumbing to the grip of the moment; compelled to follow it, we are unable to focus, to settle upon a given object or point within the field. The effect, then, is of rhythmic compulsion and relaxation. The notion of limitation is transposed from the gradual reduction of the size of field to the gradual imposition of insistent directionality, intensified by the metronomic click which seems sometimes to lead, sometimes to accompany, the action.

In these three filmic works, the artist has seized upon a strategy proper to the medium and carried it to ultimate consequences, exploring its resonances, re-inforcing it with parallel strategies, insisting on the isomorphism of part and whole. These strategies, and the persistence of a certain speculative quality in Snow's art, a preoccupation with the manner in which a statement

generates counterstatement, variation and extension can be seen as constant in his evolution as film-maker and as painter, sculptor . . .

[1]Aron Gurwitsch, "On the Intentionality of *Consciousness*." in *Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and its Interpretation*, p. 125.

[2]Gérard Granel, *Le Sens du temps et de la perception chez Husserl*, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1968), p. 108. The translation is my own. For other instances of this in increasingly frequent metaphor, I refer the reader to pages XXI and XXII of Peter Koestenbaum's Introductory Essay on Husserl's *Paris Lectures*, translated by Koestenbaum and published in 1967 by Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague. The view sustaining these observations is also adumbrated in an essay of my own, *Bodies in Space: Film as Carnal Knowledge*, (*Artforum*, February 1969), written, however, before the present essay had presented the occasion for this sort of anthologizing. The earliest text known to me, bearing upon these considerations is Hugo Musterberg's *The Film: A Psychological Study*, originally published in 1916 and reissued in 1970 by Dover Publications, Inc. It is an early and remarkable attempt at a phenomenological analysis of the cinematic experience.

[3]Reprinted in *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 250.

[4]Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), p. 44.

[5]For the discussion of the hypnagogic image, I have relied heavily on Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Imaginaire* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1948), pp. 58–76.

Extract from an article in *Artforum*, June 1971

Back and Forth

Peter Gidal

Back and Forth is a film of sheer physical strength, the strength of a *process* of bending space into his (her) vision. A relativistic film wherein the act of the film-makers's mind/body is the primary motion in space and time. This act, for Mike Snow, is the utilisation of the machine/mechanism (camera & lens) to concentrate on and effect change within a specifically narrowly delimited reality (a classroom). The film is 'about' a camera swivelling back and forth from one end of the horizontal pan to the other (i.e. left to right, right to left, left to right, etc.). (Then up and down, down and up, etc.) The concentration, within this defined space, on one singular movement/rhythm hypnotically defines the arena for physical and mental action. This arena becomes activated through the film-maker's consequent consistency, the recurring movement, over and over again, until that movement (by virtue of the repetition) becomes the subject of the film. It should be mentioned, though, that the repetition is not a mechanistic one (i.e. loop structure reprinted over and over in the labs) but rather a non-mechanistic one (i.e. the film consists of re-takes, each back-and-forth, or cluster of back-and-forth actions, re-shot by the film-maker).[1] Thus we are dealing with actual repetition. The paradox of course is that there is no such thing, since time, for one, moves forward in a linear fashion and thus no exact replication of a previous vision or action is possible.

The specific action of the constant back-and-forth movement is the subject-matter of the film. But more than this, the quickening back-and-forth motion forces the three-dimensional classroom into a flat space of sheer visible movement. (The room is rectangular, and we see a corner and two adjacent walls, partially.) The quickening pace of the camera's pans forces, coerces, the depth-perspective *physically* into a flat space, flattening out walls, windows, lights, chairs, desks, people, into the frantic flat blur, with only the back-and-forth movement *per se* still intact. Perspective is wiped out, literally, in front of our eyes, and the universe (the specifically chosen reality here being the room) becomes dominated by the relativistic actions. We become aware of relativity through the act of perceptual cognition. The theory of relativity (the Einstein joke explanation: 'Instead of asking when this train stops in Zurich, we must ask, when does Zurich stop at this train?') becomes the basis of this film in all its intensity. For this intensity is made up of the incredibly complex notion but simple structure of this act of change. We feel the pressure of unbending space.

Space is flattened out. It is also compressed. The space between one point and another (either extremities of the pan) is shortened (physically!) through the speed of the pans. An area of *space* becomes real, as felt weight (space = distance between objects, i.e. walls; consisting of *nothing*, mainly). And the length of that weight becomes shortened as the pans become faster, so that again the film-maker's actions force reality as 'given' into a malleable, dominatable entity, and betray it as such. The strength of this *act* is all the more powerful in that we are dealing with an almost empty arena of action. So the film deals (literally and figuratively) with nothingness, and the weight thereof, and the reshaping thereof. The concept of these processes is thus primary, rather than any possibly metaphoric content or shape *within*.

We are forced, through the quickening pans, to actively work mentally to recapture the specifics of the defined space as we originally saw it: the process of the disintegration of form is paralleled by the viewer's mental process of re-forming reality (*and* dealing with the newly formed for its perceptual/visual concreteness). The *fact* of the new vision created by the film-maker becomes an equally *real*, concrete 'reality'. The relativism is ours. The choice being ours, we can work with the two realities and decipher both of them, analyse both of them, and the connections between the 'two', although this terminology is simplistic in that the eventual speeding up of the pans left to right/right to left does not make such a distinct demarcation line between 'one reality' and 'another'.

The individualist, existentialist (even romantic) vision combines with the communistic Marxist-Leninist analytically-materialist one, forcing the world into our conceptions and needs (though consciousness is produced by the world's material relations, not vice versa), not accepting a *fait accompli* of reactionary nature, not accepting the status quo as 'real', not adapting, sublimating or rationalising. This becomes even more apparent at that point in *Back and Forth* when we lose momentary control of the feeling that the *camera* is speeding back and forth at a mind- and object-bending pace. At this point, the relativity of the vision becomes ultimate: the room itself seems to be racing back and forth in front of our eyes. But this is not traditional, mystificatory illusionism (and of course there is also no narrative, no vicarious identification, none of the conventional manipulations of cinema which make it so perfect for indoctrinated passive audiences). The illusionism in *Back and Forth* is an exposed illusionism: we are totally aware of the relativism forced upon our senses through the specifically clearly defined (film-maker's) actions with the camera. We are aware of the process of this relativism. And the *process* of this vision, rather than any specific subject or content, is the Film itself.

The anti-illusionism of the film is also clear and apparent in that the mentioned 're-takes' of the pans and clusters of pans are spliced together with *obvious* splices. This means that each time the camera has been stopped and restarted, and each time the editing (after the shooting, not in the camera) has been effected, we see the splice mark (a white flicker on the screen caused by the light penetrating the $\frac{1}{4}$ of a frame where the splice is). Which means that

instead of A and B rolling the film for a perfect fit, Snow has decided to make clear all manipulations not only in the stage of shooting-process but also in the editing-process stage of (re)construction. The structure of the film, both as representation and as actuality of material, is de-mystified. (It would not be too far-reaching to attribute a Marxist-materialist ethic to these matters.)

Interjected in the film are various human actions. Snow has a liking for this; it is what puts most people off, in *Wavelength* too, because it detracts from the seeming purity of the statement. But what one must realise is that these actions, for all their campy obviousness (throwing a baseball back and forth in a classroom, writing on the blackboard, having a mock-fight, etc.), for all their glib statements as metaphors about 'acting', about 'reality', about 'movies', are *used* for precisely that: they manage to force the viewer to get rid of these notions, to stop dealing in verbal terms with concepts *about* reality. The actions are interjected early in the film, almost as if Snow is saying, 'O.K., we put in all that stuff, all the ideas, all the notions, all the intellectualised bullshit, all the gimmicks, we even make it funny, but let's get on with the real film now.' They are also a different set of signifieds for each 'back and forth'. And then the film really gets into its own, becomes its own total experiential reality.

Another notion concerning Snow's use of actors is that I think he is trying to put people in, in all their obvious self-awareness, so that he can dispense with the 'human', and get into the inanimate which takes on not equal (as in Warhol) but greater importance. Films are, among other things, the dialectic between human and object, but the human element of importance is behind the camera and behind the cameraman (i.e. audience), while the real subject (if one can use traditional narrative descriptions like 'subject') is space and time. And space and time under the duress of the film-maker. People have no place, ultimately, in front of the camera, except as baroque appendages. This is not only true for Snow's work, but is also Snow's obvious critical attitude towards film as such. On this level *Back and Forth* works as film criticism.

It is no more a matter of *interpreting* the film-maker's statement (whether that interpretation is crystal clear or takes 8 hours is ultimately irrelevant). It is much more a matter of trying to understand merely the film-maker's terms of reference, and then dealing with the process of that (film) experience on a dialectic level as an active viewer within the context of film viewing, which is obviously always basically a structured, manipulated experience. One can't deny that, but one can overcome it in process-oriented films (rather than model-oriented ones) which deal with awareness of manipulation rather than using the manipulation as a basic authoritarian experiential form, as the commercial cinema does, as does all traditional art for that matter.

Back and Forth changes its rigidly film-frame-defining motion about two-thirds of the way through the film, from left right/right left to up down/down up tilts. And they start at their fastest pace. We thus are immediately inundated with visual blurs of the material for perceptual analysis. We 'know' the 'blurs' as such due to the previous process of the horizontal back and forth movements. We are forced to attempt to decipher the contents of the visual stimulation, we mentally unflatten the space to fit it into our (traditional)

notions of spatial reality, while at the same time responding to the actuality of the situation as presented (i.e. flat space images almost totally abstracted through movement in time of such speed that articulation of specific images is impossible, and unnecessary). So two processes are working within us; we are consistently relativistically, dialectically dealing and trying to deal with the reality as we see it *and* the reality that we know it has been taken from (the 'original' vision). If one wants to call the film Marxist one accurately can, although of course such a defensive position shouldn't be necessary. (The coda of superimposed scene repetitions, which appears after the film-credits, is rococo rubbish, and merits no further thought.)

What I have not yet discussed is Snow's position as to narrative. Although his films are non-narrative films, they do nevertheless employ expectancy-manipulation. Snow's interest in climactic structure (in *Wavelength*, towards the picture on the wall at the far-end of the zoom-shot; in *Back and Forth* towards a higher and higher speed in the first section) betrays this partiality towards one aspect of the conventional, narrative cinema: expectancy. And the hypnotic element of a film such as *Wavelength*[2] or *Back and Forth* encourages this 'involvement' on the audience's part. In that sense, one loses oneself in the traditional way one does in the narrative cinema. One is manipulated towards a finality, towards 'resolution'. But *Back and Forth* works out this problem along satisfactory lines in that the up/down tilts begin at their fastest speed, two-thirds through the film. Thus, rather than a climax and a denouement, we have a curve which lets 'down' as slowly as it built 'up'. This hints less at a goal-oriented linear orientation than at a system wherein pace *per se* exposes and re-defines (and refines) perception in time and space. The compression of space and the flattening out of space is paralleled by the cumulative addition of moment-upon-moment of speed-increase followed by speed-decrease; the endurance created is related directly to speed (all within actual physical duration).

The wholeness of the experience is thus made up of accumulations of speeds *and their subsequent subtractions* (i.e. the pace retards more and more towards the end of the film). The 'end' of the film is literally the camera(man)'s coming to an almost-standstill. The 'end' shot has no wider or more close a vision than the 'first' shot, unlike *Wavelength* where, at the end, we have reached the photograph of the waves on the wall and seep into their re-presented infinity. The final 'shot' of *Back and Forth* is final only inasmuch as it is more still than its predecessor. Its scope is the same as the film's first shot; there has been no progression. (I should add that I am discounting the film's *actual* first shot of the outside of the room, which is too descriptive and contentually biased to be of value in terms of the film *Back and Forth*, which thus, for me, comprises everything *between* the end of 'shot one' and the beginning of the 'coda' (after the end credits!) wherein segments of the whole film are superimposed for several minutes, to no avail.)

Shortly after writing this piece I sent it to Snow, who replied at length. (See below.) He objected mainly to my harsh words about the coda. Those words

were not a personal attack; rather they were a powerful (yet rather unnecessary) reaction to a great weakness in a great film. Snow sees the coda as 'recollections', 'reminiscence'. 'Superimpositions are dreamy. (The coda) has some beauties of its own visually, too.' I'm quite happy to admit that I am not interested in Snow's work for the 'beauty'. Snow mentions other aspects of his concepts (pre and post). I'd rather not discuss them as such, for the intentions of the film-maker do not necessarily (or ordinarily) fit the finished work. His disagreement with my concept of 'nothingness' (he sees it as the opposite side of 'somethingness') is just one of many.

[1]Though this is not definitely ascertainable.

[2]In *Wavelength*, the constructiveness of expectancy is presented.

National Film Theatre Programme Notes, December 1971
(slightly revised)

Letter from Michael Snow to Peter Gidal on the film *Back and Forth*

8 March 1972

Thanks for yr. letters and the article on ←——→ which I found very interesting. In the light of what the film *is* the violence of your reaction to the 'coda' attests to a kind of success for it I'd say. Still its ill-mannered, snotty, total condemnation doesn't seem like 'criticism'.

←——→ *is* action/reaction or to put it another way: oscillation which implies 'opposites'. It is also a kind of educational film.

I can't claim to be 'right' about it but as far as depiction goes I feel the relativity view is as 'correct' as the $E=MC^2$ one. In other words the depicted solid (mass) is transformed into energy (light) by velocity. But it isn't totally transformed even as depiction because it gets as far as it might, it (disappointingly?) turns into its 'opposite', i.e. in reaction to ←- - - -→ there is ↕. Now as you say seeing the film is a very physical experience. (I can't understand why you didn't also say 'hearing' it because the sound, its qualities, relationship to the image, effect, are *so* important to the whole thing.) That is: the 'body' of the film is very physical but *it itself* has *its* reaction which is the unstructured 'mental' superimpositions of the 'coda'.

This is 'recollection', 'reminiscence'. Superimpositions are 'dreamy'. The 'coda' lacks 'body' and 'direction' especially by contrast to what went before. Being forced to use my own mind as an example of a mind at work I didn't/wouldn't/don't remember the order things happen in the/a film in the order they happen. One muses at first. Remembering them, unless there's a specific effort (and even then it only goes so far), is a seemingly random selection. The 'coda' is on the other side of the 'credits' which are of course part of the film, i.e. ←——→, and are also obviously pedagogical which might also lead one to interpret the 'coda' as a 'review' of what went before. It has some beauties of its own visually, too.

On the screen the space of the room is asymmetrical. The move is from parallel to the picture plane to perspectival. Speeding up 'flattens' it, almost 'fuses' opposites. The total shape of the film is asymmetrical pivoting on the greenboard credits (the only hold, but there one's eyes are ←—— —→ ing) . . .

I thought your article was powerful . . . but there are several points that I don't understand: to say that the film deals with 'nothingness' seems peculiar.

I think it deals with 'somethingness' with 'nothingness' as its (mental) shadow.

The people actions in ←——→ have some resemblance to those in *Wavelength* but mostly they have very different qualities and functions. They 'people' the space, they 'real' the space like in *Wavelength* but there are so many other things to them, migawd! They embody, by what they do, what the film is, they partake of what the film is.

All my films are attempts to control the type or quality of belief in the 'realistic' image. For example think about the beginning. First the 'outside' naturalistic shots. Green. Then the indoor sequence which is just long enough (to me) to become very 'abstract'. This 'abstractness' is broken in a (to me again) thrilling way when one first sees the person outside working on the windows. This *kind* of thing happens in all the sequences with people. There's a lot to them and their function. How they appear and disappear is beautiful (I think).

←——→ is percussion and *Wavelength* is song and the people parts in each case have qualities proper to those 'idioms'.

←——→ naturally consists of pros and cons and so totally experiencing it (to repeat, I think) calls for a kind of attitude which there seems to be too little of. I think ←——→ is the way things are. Yes the 'Marxist' (humanism?) is balanced by a cosmic so what . . . I'm glad the film matters to you . . . And you have an interesting advantage on me (one I'd like to have had) in considering it: I've never seen ←——→ for the first time.

Yours
Michael Snow

Notes on *La Région Centrale*

Peter Gidal

These notes are tentative. They were made after an initial viewing.

1. Description: A film, three hours long. The film begins with the camera scanning slowly and moving upwards, over the mountain location in a 'deserted' part of Quebec. The film continues, in various ways, to take in the region. The apparatus for the film's making was constructed so that the camera could swivel and turn, up and down and in and around on its own axis. It could also zoom and change aperture. Snow composed the camera movements and created an overall plan for the film. Pierre Abbeloos of Montreal worked out a system of supplying the orders to the machine to move in various patterns by means of sound tapes.

2. There is not a series of static captured images but a progression of segments *made available* to viewing through the (programmed) directionality of camera movement, and the (programmed) parameters of field of vision (through determination of the zoom lens' position). The series of images made available read as disappearances; for a long section of time (15 minutes?) the frame swoops quickly diagonally upwards and to the right, thus forcing the image-flow into and out of the lower left-hand corner of the frame.

3. Throughout, camera movement seems to be located by an ∞ design, thus at root by $\times$. The circumventure is permutated in size, shape, depth, zoom lens position, etc., so that only upon occasion is it illustrated by the camera's trajectory.

4. One can hardly speak of image-flow, as that implies flow of disparate images when what we are given is pure continuum, wherein darkness, lightness, tactility, flatness, pure space(?) (sky), filled space(?) (clouds, rocks, whatever), all function as non-ceasing existence. Inanimate. 'It' is there. But emphasis on *there*. No attempts to integrate that into an illusionistic *hereness*.

5. At some point of attained camera-movement-speed, the relativistic transference (as in *Back and Forth*) takes place. No longer is the camera moving over the (designated) central region. The frame 'becomes' static. The flow is from with*out*, thus more distanced than when the machine was seemingly doing physical work. The illusion of frame-stillness is constantly broken down and reiterated through sheer *knowledge*. This relativism amplifies the relativism that is inherent in matter and consciousness.

6. The film is not a metaphor *for* consciousness. It is a form of such. How it

is what it is. The secondary importance: the represented illusion, the content. ('Content' in the traditional terms wherein it is *not* understood that the whole, the form/structure/method/etc., is the content.) The significations are not psychological but epistemological. The film is not *myth*ical. The secondary importance: the represented. A huge arena, empty, de-peopled, and Snow's daring works (those 'perfect' clouds, those 'beautifully lit' rocks and pebbles, and that 'tactile' brown earth). Again as in *Wavelength* and *Back and Forth*, on the edge of a glossiness, a largeness which could turn into picturesqueness and idealism. It does not. It remains a film out there, and a method, through the overall persistence in time (duration: 3 hours), and through the persistence of camera movement (no hierarchical determination, merely changes in focal length, speed, f/opening, and readable as such). 'The speed information is in terms of beats or pulses going from slow to fast.' (M.S.) This is not the way the film works. Perhaps the breakdown of this is due to 'each direction having a different frequency, it starts very high, ends low . . .' (M.S.) A time-segment filled, another faster, slower, wider angle, permutations of speed and field, a paring down, a high tone, faster beats, longer intervals, etc. Changes. Not direction. Central Region is out there; you don't go into it or through it. (A fact of film: given constant speed, a wider-angle shot seems slower, a close-up faster.)

7. The second time the camera turns on itself, films the plane of non-action *'upside down'*, the relativism of directionality takes over in a forcefulness that is physical. Film is physical. The action of the film-maker upon the machine (camera) is here utilised to its fullest. And that without the film-maker actually being in touch with the machine throughout the filming. A complex alienation from the machine, inasmuch as the film *reads* as a series of inscriptions onto acetate (film) forced by the film-maker's physical presence and manipulation of the machine (device). Snow here retains control *and* separates himself from the moment-to-moment-film-shooting-mechanism. 'Control' is not dominance, but structure. *Central Region* was programmed into tape (the soundtrack). The 'result' is in no way synchronous to its programmed 'intention'. Nor was it planned to be. Snow is not an empiricist. I state the obvious. Snow looked through the lens once. A total of 6 hours of footage was shot.

8. There are shots when we see the machine's shadow. An overwhelming consciousness of ? . The problem: the futuristic notions, the possibilities of reading the machine as an heroics of domination through and romanticisation of the machine, rather than attempts to build up and break down the inherent illusionism through the manipulation of the machine (such as when its speed transforms the image-reading, and generates a set of responses independent of a wholist reading, and wholly dependent on the cumulative non-atomistic continuance of the filmic event). Thus in fact two objectivities *within the film* (not interpretations). First: the machine as device, as intermediary, mediator, transformer, magician, as well as mechanism, for breaking down of such illusion, for reading precisely the system of its materialisation. Second: the machine as 'self reliant', autonomous from its human source and labour, as

metaphor, as power, as coercion, as icon.

9. The shadow of the machine is momentary, hints at what is there, at the device that is informing this 'consciousness' (i.e. this film). Then on with the filmic event; Snow does not reiterate the machine's own qualities; a mere shadow, an admission, and viewing the *other*, why should it not also view itself or at least its shadow? Narcissistic, alienated, the detached eye free to swivel in its own socket, those are the narrative moments, associative metaphors, but they are other things as well.

10. When the camera views the region counter-clockwise in circular lateral motions, the perspectival arena flattens out. This is not a physical flattening out of the material (as happened with the walls, windows, people, desks, etc., through fast pans, in *Back and Forth*); rather, through persistent medium speed(?) the viewer is inculcated with the *inability* to focus in perspective. The inability of the eye, my eye. We go through a series of changes in mode of operation, and the one-to-one connection of viewer/film camera is as nearly obtained as it can be.

11. In reel 4 of the 5-reel film, day has darkened, lens aperture closed down (both?). Probably the former. A dark green-blue for sky-earth and a darkness finally such that we see the green-blue colour without outlines of object or horizon. Even movement is obliterated by the darkness which makes visibility in the terms we are accustomed to impossible. The film grain takes precedence. In fact it becomes the sole recognisable movement. The colour's make-up, the grain, asserts its presence, ineffably. The thereness of the film has relativised into a thereness of *film per se*.

12. And reflexiveness that is as uncontrollable, as immediate in response to the film as the 'film' is an immediate response to its own devices, its own viewing-mechanics. A system of consciousness, a method, an epistemology.

13. The sound. Differing rhythm patterns, akin to both Steve Reich's *Drumming* structures, made up of variations on a basic pattern, and to early Terry Riley (*Poppy Nogood's Allnite Flight*, 1967), in terms of: pieces of time-sound, beats, lengths, stretching sound into layers, paralleling, overlapping, cutting off, rather than melodising.

14. In reel 5 the camera movements begin to whip into three arenas. A counter-clockwise movement, in terms of three rapid jerks (thus inscribed by a triangle). At first the counter-clockwise circle/triangle captures the 'image' of ground, speeding past, a blur, up to the 'sky', then slower; (after recurrence one sees it is the *distance* of sky which 'slows down' its passage). Acceleration. The circular movement finally completely flattens everything after establishing its own shape of movement *upon* the representation. Close-up earth. Longshot blue sky. Longshot into whiteness of sun overexposure. Close-up earth. Longshot blue sky. Over and over. Speed is annexing areas of space, earth, blue, white, pure non-temporal light, empty(?) screen.

15. Sections of the film are 'interrupted' by a rostrum shot of an 'X' (distended laterally). (The camera had to be re-loaded; editing cuts were made.) It's the diagram of the root of the camera movements throughout the film. It is the *gestalt*, or rather the analogue for the *gestalt* of the film. This is

not to say that the film is of a whole, closed. However, it is heuristic. Artificial time-insertions cancel any interest on Snow's part in illusionist splice-denying; time-break denying editing procedure. One of the last intercuts is – rather than a 'real time' filming off a rostrum (the way titles are filmed) – a freeze of the 'X' image. The seemingly simple inanimateness of the 'X' intercut is revealed as dialectically oppositioned to live action.

If memory serves, sound terminates when the interruptive 'X' section is spliced on between sections. These sections are at each reel beginning, as well as variously placed throughout the film. They structure the time-segments, an external structure to that generated by the film-making process itself (the recording 'of' which *is* the film).

16. The Central Region is out there, a film, 3 hours, five reels; and to end with a quote from the film-maker: 'I decided to extend the machine aspect of film so that there might be a more objective feeling, you wouldn't be thinking of someone's expressive handling of the thing but perhaps how and why the whole thing got set in motion.' Snow's words on *Central Region* having been studiously avoided until now, I find the sentence: 'You are here, the film is there. It is neither fascism nor entertainment.' Had I not read that I would have written it.

July 1973, *Light One*

Kurt Kren's Films

Malcolm LeGrice

The temptation in writing about Kurt Kren is to present him as some kind of father of European avant-garde film. His work is certainly held in very high regard by almost all the film-makers this side of the Atlantic involved in so-called structuralist film. At forty-six years old (born in Vienna on 20 September 1929), beginning his experiments with film on 8mm as early as 1953 and completing his first 16mm film in 1957, he has at least a ten-year start on those like Birgit and Wilhelm Hein, Peter Gidal, Werner Nekes, Peter Weibel, Valie Export or myself who otherwise have been the main generation initiating the 'formal' direction outside the USA.

However, to see Kren in this way is somewhat misleading. Though his historical role is of great importance he should in no way be condemned to the history books, as he continues to be a leading figure of the avant-garde. Secondly, none of the innovators who started work later, in the mid-sixties, was a follower of Kren. Most, like myself, had already started in this direction before encountering Kren's films. The lack of information here about the American underground film was matched by a similar lack of exchange within Europe itself. I first saw a Kren film in 1967 or '68, during one of the early presentations of the London Film co-op. It was in a programme dominated by some very poor and obscure films from the USA. (The first American works to be distributed here came mostly from Robert Pike's Creative Film Society catalogue, and my reaction was very unfavourable to what I came to realize later were films quite unrepresentative of the New American Cinema.) The Kren film, *10/65 Selbstvertümmelung*, was one of his less evidently formal works, but even so, I recognized a close affinity in filmic concept with the work I was doing. This was borne out by seeing some of his other films soon after, particularly *15/67-TV* which remains for me his most influential film.

In many ways, the post-war Vienna art scene revived as an independent force more quickly than it did in most other European centres. It was also less dominated by the powerful new movements originating in the affluence of post-war America. Though the development of the Austrian direct art and material aktion movements of Brus, Muehl and Nitsch parallels the Happenings movement and has similar roots in Abstract Expressionism, the

Viennese development was an independent growth from the already strong expressionist tradition of Klimt, Schiele or Kokoschka. Film experiment in Vienna also significantly preceded any other similar development in Europe and was likewise completely independent of the American Underground cinema. Apart from Kren's early 8mm films, which he does not consider as 'public' work, the first important post-war experimental film from Austria was *Mosaik im Vertrauen*, made jointly in 1955 by Ferry Radax and Peter Kubelka. In 1957 Kubelka made *Adebar*, Kren made *1/57-Versuch mit syntetischem Ton* and Marc Adrian began work on *Black Movie*. Though Kubelka collaborated with Radax on the one film, these four Viennese film-makers were not a group; they worked separately and had no significant influence on each other. Kren and Kubelka, whose respective films represent the most radical innovation in film thought at that time, demand some comparison. By 1961, both film-makers had produced at least three films, which together with contemporary work by Brakhage (particularly *Sirius Remembered*, 1959) and a little later Warhol (*Sleep*, 1963) brought about the biggest changes in concepts of film form since the early experiments of Man Ray, Léger, Eggeling, Richter et al. As such, I see these four film-makers as the main precursors of the current direction of avant-garde cinema.[1] In the case of Kubelka, the three films are *Adebar* (1957), *Schwechater* (1958) and the exceptional, blank screen, alternating black and white *Arnulf Rainer* (1960). For Kren they were *2/60-48 Köpfe aus dem Szondi-Test, 3/60-Bäume im Herbst* (both 1960) and *4/61-Mauern-Positiv-Negativ und Weg* (1961). Perhaps Kren's first 16mm film should be included as it certainly breaks significantly new ground, but it is not as clearly successful as the other three.

Though, unlike most other commentators, I have never considered Kubelka's *Unsere Afrikareise* to be more than a well-made but ordinary film, his three earlier films are rightly recognized as major points of reference, and it is a source of consternation and surprise to myself and many of my contemporaries that Kren's work is not similarly recognized by American critics. An atmosphere of recrimination has come to surround the comparison of these two Viennese innovators, and it is difficult to maintain an impartial stance . . .

Kubelka's best film remains the imageless, cinema-concrete, *Arnulf Rainer*. Considering the time at which it was produced, it makes an extreme and surprising challenge to preconceptions about film content, eliminating both photography and representation. *Adebar* and *Schwechater* are also important and accomplished works, but their concept of abstracting kinetic qualities by high contrast printing and the use of negative, and counterpointing this with the orchestration of the montage, can be seen to fulfil a graphic function similar to certain abstract avant-garde films of the twenties (*i.e.* sequences from Hans Richter's *Film Studie* 1926). Through the image contrast and the editing rate, the photographic trace is separated from the identity and association of the image. Movement and rhythm are thereby abstracted into the visual-musical play of forms, consistent with the often explicit aims of early abstract films. The development of this graphically abstract aesthetic in

film had lagged behind through the lack of experiment between the wars. But by the late fifties, in comparison with contemporary developments in the other arts, it no longer represented as fundamental an aesthetic challenge as *Arnulf Rainer,* or posed as complex artistic problems as the Kren films of the same period. In fact, a major distinction in Kren's work is the broad rejection of the abstract-graphic solution to the search for new film form. The image never becomes divorced from the thing filmed or the processes of film. His work maintains a constant, tense dialectic between conception and structuring on the one hand and experience in the subjective, existentialist sense on the other . . .

As a Jewish child in Vienna, Kren grew up with the spreading anti-semitism of the emerging Third Reich and was sent to spend all the war years hidden in relative safety in Holland. He rejoined his family in Austria in 1947, but seems never to have been able to recover a satisfactory emotional contact with them. He became a cashier in the Austrian National Bank, continuing to work there until 1968. Since his first 16mm film, *1/57-Versuch mit syntetischem Ton* (all his film titles are methodically pre-fixed by the number of the work in complete chronology, followed by the year of realization, thus 1/57 denotes film no 1, 1957), there have been three distinct phases in his work. The first extends from 1957 to 1962 during which he completed five films; the second from 1964 to 1967 when he made eight (6/64 to 13/67), all based around the work of other artists, particularly the actions of Otto Muehl and Günter Brus, though *11/65* is based on an Op-art picture by Helga Philip; and the third is from 1967 to the present, continuing individual film work (14/67 to 31/75), but it has extended to include the production of drawings, collages, prints and in particular five limited edition boxes, each containing an 8mm copy of one of his films, facsimiles of the preparatory diagrams, documentation and photographs which are sold in the same way as prints. In the last phase there have been further collaborations with Muehl – but in the more clearly defined role of cameraman or participant in Muehl's work – and with Brus, where Brus has been simply a participant in a Kren film.

In many ways the work divides more simply in two, the wholly individual films and the two years of deep involvement with Muehl and Brus. The notoriety of the Muehl actions, and the overwhelming content in the films which are based on them, perhaps explains some of the lack of understanding of Kren's work in America. Even amongst English film-makers there is a tendency to dismiss this period as irrelevant to Kren's main contribution. This is short-sighted, since the films stand as satisfactory works and certainly have an important bearing on his work as a whole . . .

The psychological approach is inevitable for many of Kren's films, but almost all his work raises philosophical questions about the relationship between experience and structure. Almost all, including the middle period, have used systems to govern either the editing or shooting. In most cases this has taken the form of preparatory diagrams and graphs drawn with mathematical precision, indicating the various correlations of shots and their durations. Whatever the general implications of using mathematical systems

for ordering experience, considering how, with constant projection speed, the single frame unit of cinematography provides a simple link between duration and number, in film, system becomes particularly apt. In his attempts to order experience through film, Kren has made this number-duration correlation basic, discovering for it a variety of functions and potentialities. The germ for most of these functions can be traced to his first four films, but because the development is not tidy and some films characterize a direction well, whilst others contain a number of directions in one film, I will not take the work chronologically.

In classical montage, shots follow each other in a combination intended either to maintain the illusory flow of action, or as in the Eisenstein sense, to maximise the dramatic, expressive collision between them. From his first 16mm film, Kren has counteracted both the narrative and expressive concepts of montage through mathematically organized montage configurations. Consequently, many of his films make use of a limited number of repeated shots in various combinations and lengths. Though some of his films, like *3/60 Bäume im Herbst*, employ system at the shooting stage. In these the connection between shots should not be considered as montage in any sense, a problem to which I shall return when considering the structuralist question.

I will again begin with some of the middle period films, for whilst I find the Muehl action films, like *6/64 – Papa und Mama*, *7/64 – Leda und der Schwan* or *9/64–O Tannenbaum*, quite satisfactory works as a whole, I find their use of system the least aesthetically challenging. In spite of the strong content, it is in these films that the montage is most abstract, in a sense, with the greatest divorce between image and system. As in most of his work, these films are constructed from shots fragmented into very short lengths, rarely longer than one second, and frequently as short as a few frames. In the Muehl action films, the result of this fragmentation is to minimize recognition of the objects in favour of increasing attention to their abstract qualities of colour, texture and movement. The systems explore an intricate network of links based on these abstract qualities. In addition, the rhythm of the montage itself in these films tends to work as a 'musical' composition, the system giving an overall co-ordinating shape. Although the rhythm of movements within the shots in these films may combine with the rhythm of the montage, because Kren more typically uses fairly static images and camera, the montage rhythm is frequently a dominant feature of his work. Kren has developed a considerable control over visual rhythm in this musical sense, the concepts being comparable with the note-row techniques of Schoenberg rather than with more classical compositional ideas. As with Kubelka's *Adebar* and *Schwechater*, this visual abstraction of the shots and musical concept of montage is consistent with the aims of the early avant-garde abstract films, though in Kren this never becomes a graphic light-play, and always maintains some link with associative identity, particularly in these films with tactile, body associations.

Even though initiated within a similar compositional concept of system, certain of his works lead in another direction. In *20/60-48 Köpfe aus dem*

Szondi Test and *11/65-Bild Helga Philip*, for example, the element of perceptual enquiry becomes dominant. Watching the films provides the basis of information about optical and cinematic functioning, which becomes the films' chief content. Especially in *48 Köpfe aus dem Szondi Test*, where a set of still photographs of faces (the contents of a box originally intended for an obscure psychological test), are sequentially permutated using different rates of image change, the system provides the visual changes in information but does not constitute a unifying composition in the classical sense. This shift in attitude, where the film becomes, as it were, perceptual raw material, makes way for a reflexive engagement by the viewer, where his own, rather than the film-maker's perception and reaction become the primary content.

Kren's use of system provides an opportunity to look for some clearer edge to the loose terminology of structural film. In my view, there are very few cases where any useful relationship can be drawn between the so-called structuralist films and the broad field of Structuralism in general. System and structure should not be used synonymously. Almost all Kren's films are systemic, but only a certain group raise structuralist questions. (Though in the loose concept of structuralist film which persists, all his work would be classed as structural.)

Broadly, I see structuralism as a result of the dialectical problem of the concept of order (ordering) in relationship to experience. In this respect, far from being in conflict with existentialism, it can be thought of as a development from it, making extreme subjectivity compatible with order by removing from the notion of structure either an *a priori* or authoritarian implication (the main bases of existential rejection of order). Order is no longer seen as a fixed, immutable condition of the world, but the consequence of changing and developing acts of ordering. Whilst there is a recognition that no fixed structure for experience exists, there is also a recognition that there can be no neutral state of unconditioned experience. The development of experience depends on developments of structuring. I see the movement from Cézanne to Analytical Cubism as the historical basis of visual structural art. Structuralism in art would seem to imply a broadly representational, or more accurately, homological, condition. This 'homology' is defined by Lévi-Strauss as an analogy of functions rather than of substance. In *The Structuralist Activity*,[2] Roland Barthes talks of a process whereby the structuralist decomposes the real and then recomposes it. The reconstructed 'object', which I take to imply mainly the structuralist art object, is described as a simulacrum of the 'natural object' and is seen as 'intellect added to object'. He stresses that 'between the two objects, or two tenses, of structuralist activity, there occurs *something new* . . .' (Barthes' italics). Structuralist art can be thought of as the material formation of experience through the explicit incursion into the thing (event) observed by the mode of observation. In this sense, structuralist art does not *express* experience derived from the world: it *forms* experience in the trace of a dialectic between perceiver and perceived. It is perhaps this concentration on structure as process or activity which most recommends the project to the time-based film medium at the present time.

However inadequate it might be later, I would like for now to confine the use of the term structuralism in film to situations where the space/time relations of a filmed situation are reformed or transformed through a definable structuring strategy into a new 'experiential' (as opposed to didactically conceptual) homology. In this notion of structuralism, whilst the shape or wholist element of Snow's films, most evident in *Wavelength*, would not constitute a structuralist problem, the transformation (or fusion) of time/space in the experience of his ⟷ and *Central Region* would. In both cases, the space/time experience can be thought of as an homology brought about by the consistent application of a camera strategy.

Kren's first structuralist film then is *3/60-Bäume im Herbst* (*Trees in Autumn*, incidentally the first film in general I would call structuralist). Its structuralism is a result of the application of system, not to subsequent montage of material already filmed with an unconstrained subjectivity, but to the act and event of filming itself. This limitation, by narrowing the space and time range of the shot material, gives rise to a greater integrity in the film as homologue. In *Bäume im Herbst* the new space/time fusion of the experience of branches shot against the sky IS the plasticity of the shooting system become the relations of the objects – shots, and their space/time observational relations are inseparable. Structural process becomes object. This prefigures Snow's ⟷ and echoes the plasticity of time/space relations in a Giacometti painting. Though similar conditions occur in a number of Kren films, particularly the window sections in *5/62-Fenstergucker, Abfall, etc.* and *17/62-Grün-Rot*, it is most perfectly illustrated in *28/73-Zeitaufnahme(n)*, a film which has a striking relationship to a Giacometti portrait (I would cite Giacometti as the clearest example of a contemporary structuralist painter).

Kren's preparatory drawings for the shooting of this 'portrait head' film show how he sees filmic space as a result of the interaction between various focal lengths of lens, the minimally changing camera position and the rates of change of both. Sections of the film have successions of single frame shots made with small changes of viewpoint, and other sections superimpose viewpoints on each other. In the film, the transparent, vibrating head defines its space/time image as a function of the filming procedure. As in *Bäume im Herbst*, it is the nature of the relations established between the separate 'shots' (significantly different in kind to montage relations through editing) which determine it as a structural homologue. In a sense, what is represented in these films is not the trees or the head (as Lévi-Strauss' 'substance'), but instead the space/time relations of the film viewing and shooting process (as 'functions'). Objects are seen as an amalgam with their space and especially with their time as the process of their accessibility through acts of perception. So again, what is 'represented' in the films is not a tree or a head but a filmic art of perception. It is also not represented in the sense that the film becomes a description, expression or even model for the generalized act of perception existing prior to the 'representation'. The films are acts of perception taking place under particular constraints of procedure and medium – acts of film-perception. The result of this activity is a genuinely new 'object' (the film being Barthes' second

tense of structuralist activity) wherein certain 'postulates' of time/space procedure have been added to the 'natural object' (Barthes' first tense of structuralist activity).

That film structuralism, structuralism in literature or anthropology, differ, relates to the specificity of the medium. In the same way in which a Truffaut or Godard film, illusionistically portraying an existentialist hero, is because of its interior filmic relations not an existentialist film, so a structuralist film is not defined simply by the structuralist attitude of its maker. There must be an integrity between the capacities and material properties of the medium and the structural procedures adopted. That these procedures are not confined to the application of numerical system, but can be achieved through other strategies, is evident through films like *Bedroom* by Gidal or Snow's *Central Region*. However, I have drawn the structural definition in this instance in a very narrow way, including the provision that the work should have an homologous relationship with a particular observational situation, so that the two tenses of structuralist activity may be appreciated within the film.

Some of the difficulties of maintaining this narrow definition in the light of some recent conceptual and reflexive works are also raised in Kren's *15/67-TV*. Although the filming situation is narrow in this film, being confined to five short sequences all filmed from within a dock-side café, the work does not aim to be a homologue of the space-time relations intrinsic to the situation and procedure of the filming itself. The filmed sequences are largely separated from their representational function, to become the subject of subsequent systematization where their relationships within the film-presentation are much more significant than the procedural relationship with their origin. The broad effect and historical significance of this film lies in shifting the emphasis of structural activity away from the film-maker's ordering of his filmic subject to that of the spectator's structuring of the filmic presentation. The film's viewer must engage in a speculative, reflexive structuring of the film as it proceeds. There are of course a number of other undeniable levels of content in the work. These include the subjective choice of situation and image by the film-maker, his attitude to the act of filming, and the similarly subjective choice of mathematical system and its application in the film. But by far the most significant level of content in *TV* is the viewer's awareness of his own behaviour in structuring the experience of the film itself. This is not simply an attempt to elucidate the film-maker's hidden system, but an experience of the various phases, stages and strategies which are encountered in the act of attempting to structure the events of the film.

The five sequences (each appears twenty-one times in all) are sufficiently similar to each other to ensure that the initial problem faced is the discrimination of the shots themselves. All the shots, which are about one and a half seconds long, are separated from each other by periods when the screen is black. Again the viewer begins to discriminate the differences in black duration, becoming aware that there is a consistent pattern and that this forms a system of punctuation, first separating the shots, then longer gaps between the 'sentences' (groups of five shots),then even longer gaps marking the ends of

the 'paragraphs' (which vary in length). At a certain stage of discrimination and recognition of the shots and their pattern of combination, the viewer begins to speculate, attempting to predict the development; and this prediction is subsequently confirmed or denied by the film. Though the system is basically logical, it is not ultimately consistent as a permutation or symmetrical structure. In some more recent films like Bill Brand's *Moment* and even Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*, a similar concept has tended to become a more mechanistic puzzle, encouraging the viewer to identify content with a specific solution to the 'scrambler'. The inconsistency in Kren's system eliminates any simple goal for the viewer's reflexive, structural activity. In *TV*, the viewer is drawn into a mode of behaviour by the systemic aspect of the film, but not permitted to identify 'content' with a systemic abstract of the work. The content, which continues to develop after repeated viewings and even when fully aware of the system, lies in the experience of the stages of a structural activity from perceptual discrimination, to awareness of a rhythm of repetition, to the conscious use of memory and prediction in conceptual patterning.

In the same way in which I would quote *Bäume im Herbst* as the first structural film, I would quote *TV* as the first thoroughly realized work of reflexive cinema transferring the primary arena for structuralist activity to the viewing of the film itself.

[1]See Malcolm LeGrice's book *Abstract Film and Beyond*, Studio Vista/M.I.T. Press, 1977.

[2]From *Essais Critiques*, 1964. Translation by Richard Howard in *Partisan Review*, Winter 1967.

Extracted from an article in *Studio International*, November 1975

Interview with Hollis Frampton

Peter Gidal

PG: What do you consider *Zorns Lemma* to be about?

HF: Well, I can tell you what the film came out of, and how it reached its present form . . . I first began using a movie camera at the end of Fall of 1962. At that time I was being systematically forced into cinema in a way by my still work. I'd been working for a long time in series, sometimes long series, and there were things that began to trouble me about the still series. Such as, if you have a bunch of photographs that you believe cohere even in book space, let alone on a gallery wall or something like that, there's no way to determine the order in which they're seen, or the amount of time for which each one is seen, or to establish the possibility of a repeat . . . so that had already made me think of the film. As a kind of ordering and control, a way of handling stills.

PG: So the control element is time?

HF: Yeah. Then at the same time I was thinking a lot about the standard paradoxes about photography. You have all these spatial illusions, tactile illusions even, whereas there is a cultural reflex somewhere to believe that when you're looking at something it's real. Let's say. Even if that is the impression you're assembling only from the barest of abstract kind of thing . . . and at the same time the thing is undeniably absolutely flat, it doesn't have impasto, it has nothing, it is perfectly superficial, it only has an outside. That paradox seemed to me most strongly embodied in some stills I had made of words, environmental words, where the word as a graphic element that brought one back to reading (and being conscious of looking at a mark on a surface) emphasised the flatness of the thing. And at the same time the tactile and spatial hints that were compounded with it, the presence of the word within the image, were full of illusion. So that I'd begun to make a bunch of these still photographs. And I thought, 'Well, I'll make them into a film', and I shot better than 2000 words in 35mm still. With the idea that I was going to just put them on a stand and shoot them. And I did a little of that as a matter of fact. It's perfectly dead.

It was simply going absolutely noplace . . . Well, that's how the thing began,

as a concern with that spatial paradox or set of spatial paradoxes, and the kind of malaise that it generated as you get farther and farther into it. There still are a few of those original black and white photographs. They all have some real object lying on top of it. The oldest one is the word 'fox', from the old Brooklyn Fox theatre, that I think is the first one I made . . . dark blue sky, some little straw flowers or paper flowers on top of it as a memento to the sentimental nature of the occasion.

PG: Before you go on about your concerns in *Lemma* could you briefly, fairly descriptively, give an idea what *Lemma* itself is?

HF: Can I describe it?

PG: Yeah, and then go on to the conceptual thing which led to the actual film. To some degree first give a clarification of the film itself.

HF: Well that's easy. There are 3 parts, first part is 5 minutes long, soundtrack with no image, a woman recites in a schoolteacherly voice 24 rhymes from the Bay State Primer which was designed to teach late 18th-century and early 19th-century children the alphabet. The primer is oriented towards death, towards accepting authority, a kind of rote learning in the dark, I suppose. The second section opens with an enunciation of the Roman alphabet itself, with as little context as possible. The letters are made of metal, actually they were typed on tin foil and photographed in one-to-one closeup. That's how it developed.

PG: I was wondering about that.

HF: Yeah, they weren't cast.

PG: They look like huge cast, 3, 4 feet tall, silver . . .

HF: In the body of the second section, the main section of the film, which is 45 minutes long, there are 2,700 one-second cuts, one second segments, 24 frame segments, of which about half consist of words; the words were alphabetised. The reason for alphabetising them really was to make the order of them as random as possible, that is to say to avoid using my own taste and making little puns out of them or something like that, much as the encyclopedists of the Enlightenment thought they could somehow categorise all human knowledge or a large part of it under the initial letter of the name of the subject. So that it just happens that quaternians are found in volume so-and-so under 'Q' – it's crazy when you think about it. As it is, it does generate some intelligible phrases, some odd pairings anyway. Let's see, there's a kind of Hart Crane line early on that reads 'nectar of pain', there's a phrase of Victorian pornography, 'limp member', which sticks out like a sore thumb, a limp thumb or something – straight out of *My Secret Life* or *A Man and a Maid*. Well, that happens of course – the words were mostly, not all of them but mostly, shot from the environment. They're store signs, posters and so on. And one finds out very quickly that very many words begin with 'c' and 's' and so forth, very few begin with 'x' or 'q'. One quickly begins to run out of 'q's'

and 'x's' and 'z's'. What happens here is that essentially one is using a chance operation. What always happens when using a chance operation is that along with generating some things that you want it also generates holes. Fate has problems. It's always true. And one has to think a great deal more about the holes, having taken care of the operations. Well, I don't know at what point the notion of substituting other images for words as they disappear in each alphabetic slot supervened. Particularly, I first thought all the images would be different. It would be what John Simon called (fake German accent) 'Just a jumble of imaches' . . . And for quite a long time I held that notion of the film. The greatest bulk of time was really shopping in Manhattan for the words themselves. I can't say I did it day after day for seven years, but I did it for seven years, and I shot actually four times as many words as I used, as well as duplications. The word 'shot' comes up again and again; I think I used the word 'shot' five times. From which to choose essentially. Some just didn't work out for one reason or another. Rather than make 1,350 entirely separate shots. I didn't want to use stock footage. I could achieve essentially the same degree of randomness by using 24 and by dissecting them, exploding them, and once that occurred to me, the possibility of developing an iconography . . .

PG: As separate . . .

HF: Yeah, as separate from the words and what they were doing and so forth, presented itself. From then it was easy, I did shoot some images that I did not use in fact. There's one image I remember of sawing wood, sawing a board, that I tried several times to get together. Many of the images are in some sense sculptural, to do with kind of generative acts concerning 3-dimensional space rather than 2-dimensional space.

PG: But each image is 1 second long, and substitutes. So the time sequence, the time span is the same, whether the image is visual or verbal-visual.

HF: Yes, that's right. They're all one second. Well, in fact they're not all one second. I suppose I should talk about this: all my work contains mistakes, presumably everybody's work contains mistakes, and sometimes I find them out when I'm doing them, and lock into them one way or another, sometimes I find them out later. Some people think the whole thing is a mistake. But if you think about any long and comparatively ambitious work, it always contains errors of some kind or other. *Divine Comedy* contains metric errors where Dante got locked into the text and had to, you know, fight his way out of it; maybe it doesn't come off so well . . . So I decided deliberately to incorporate a series of kinds of errors.

PG: A system of errors.

HF: Right, so that I'd know where they were, since they were gonna be there anyway. And at the moment I won't go into that, but there is one class of metrical errors. There are 12 images which are 23 frames long and 24 which are 25 frames long. And I did not generate those myself. The person who was helping me cut the footage down into one second lengths determined by his

own chance operations where they were, and cut them.

PG: Still, but even when it happens, I mean I noticed the 'errors' while watching the film again. Still, it comes over very clearly that it's one second segments. You feel a certain tension at moments when it breaks. But not to the point of mystification where one thinks, 'Is it a second or not?' It's basic that each time piece is one second.

HF: But then that's an elastic interval. It depends a lot on how much there is to see in the frame. I mean, some of them are very simple and very graphic, where you almost start to get bored, 24 frames . . . There are others where there's at least a suggestion that if you saw one second over fifty times it would still be frantic. Your eyes would be crawling around the frame trying to get the stuff out of it . . .

But to get on with the description of the thing: finally, all the words are replaced by images. The last one is 'c' which is a red Ibis flapping its wings in the Bronx zoo, which is seen for only one second in the entire hour of the film.

PG: I think many people leave thinking whether or not the images totally substituted. It's not a sense of completion. There is completion but not that total sense of completion.

HF: Yeah, well it depends . . . some people play that part of the film as a game. Some audiences were playing it so much they were waiting to see which would go out next and what would replace it and so forth. And when finally the 'c' does substitute in the last cycle of the film, there have been cheers, and so forth (giggling, laughter, etc.). Then finally there's a section 10 or 11 minutes long in which a man, woman and dog walk from very near foreground to a distance close to 400 yards across a field of snow and disappear at the end into pine woods. It is for all intents and purposes a continuous take. In part, it's not; it's a shot of five 100 feet rolls, and suggestions of fogged ends are left in, and it's dissolved, so . . . if you're at all into the materiality of film, it suggests several times that it's about to end, then it dissolves into a new image, then finally goes out to white. There's a track on the last part which consists of six women's voices reading a text by Robert Gros-tet or Grosse-teste . . . who was a bishop of Lincoln. A text called 'On Light, or the Ingression of Forms', which is a beautiful medieval Latin treatise which is variously translated. Translated, vulgarised by me, then cut down to about 620 words. It's read pocketed. At the rate of one word a second. And the text itself I think is apposite to film and to whatever my epistemological views of film are. The key line in the text is a sentence that says, 'In the beginning of time, light drew out matter along with itself into a mass as great as the fabric of the world.' Which I take it is a fairly apt description of film, as the total historical function of film, not as an art medium but as this great kind of time capsule, and so forth. It was thinking on that which led me later to posit the universe as a vast film archive which contains nothing in itself and presumably somewhere in the middle, the undiscoverable centre of the whole matrix of filmthoughts, an unfindable viewing room in which the great presence sits through eternity screening the infinite footage.

PG: Screening unshot negatives.

HF: Well, what have you! Is it then the infinite intelligence which in the act of doing the screening imagines the images into the frame and they reflect back into the projector? One can make a whole religion out of this thing!

PG: We're trying.

HF: I plan to have more to say about that. That's my metaphor because I'm a film-maker. I mean Borges has a wonderful story called 'The Library of Babel' in which the entire universe has been transformed into a library of books. And while conjecturing about the actual structure of the library he manages to reconstruct the entire history of human thought. In terms of this one metaphor, I'm not so much in sympathy with books as Borges is, so that this cinematic metaphor seems to be more poignant; more meat.

PG: But if you're talking about Borges, I find important and beautiful in *Lemma* the fact that it's non-mystificatory, that it isn't labyrinthine at all, and that on one level, for me at least, it denies logic and function. In that sense it's really an anti-calvinist film . . .

HF: Oh, I'll go along with that.

PG: And you're substituting visual templates for verbal ones. Considering the cultural system we're brought up in, really you're setting up a defunctionalised system. Let's face it: the *word*. 'First there was the word.' And if you are going to fuck up the word in some cases in *Lemma* with a non-linear image, you are making a non-hierarchical system which is already blowing the whole game.

HF: Absolutely. Let me tell you a bit more what this film is for me. A couple of people spotted it too. The film is for me a kind of cryptic autobiography, in a way. I have the kind of standard mid-Western American Protestant education in which you do learn by precept and by rote in the dark. And it was, although perhaps not to that kind of puritanical extent, authority-ridden and death-saturated, and so forth. Presumably, everybody, well I won't say everybody, many of my contemporaries or peers have very much the same kind of experience. It was highly oriented to words. And even to words only in the most superficial denotative kind of way. This is where one could call it Calvinist as well.

PG: Definitely.

HF: Part 2 really has a great deal to do with something that happened to me somewhere between the ages of 20 and 30, 32, 33, something like that, a decade and a half that I've spent largely in New York. If you think about it, it represents a kind of long dissolve, a very attenuated and skippy dissolve, from primarily verbal to primarily nonverbal concerns: the last part in the film, also of course the middle section, was all shot in Manhattan, pointedly urban, in one way or another, in its visual style; a conglomeration, a gluttination of successive visual styles which are imitated in the individual shots. This is still very much distancing itself from, in one way or another, renaissance space,

that sort of urban rectilinearity. Then finally the last part turned out to be prophetic. Simon Field wrote to me in the summer of 1970 – at least I think it was him – and asked me whether the film was autobiographical, and whether the last part of the film had something to do with some kind of gesture of leaving the city, as a lot of New York artists were doing. And at the time of the film's making I had not left. I thought of it in January 1970 on a farm a friend of mine had just got 25 miles from where my place now is. I was out at the country looking for a place. And it turned out to be prophetic.

PG: The second segment of the film already hints at that, by ending with earth air fire water.

HF: Sure. Very much so.

PG: What you should perhaps talk about is that it isn't just leading to getting out, moving in one direction; what I find so important is precisely that some images are linear in their substitution for letters, like tying a shoe, peeling an orange; others are not. And not in any specific order. Although the last are earth air fire water, then the third segment is walking out to the snow, the final feeling of the whole film, of the final structure of the film as such, doesn't leave one with that feeling. Doesn't leave me with a narrative notion of the film-maker leaving the urban environment. It leaves me much more with a system, a new system of alphabet. A self-contained serial.

HF: Ok. I might want to get back to that later. I suppose I do most of my work in such a way that I supply a certain amount, I make a kind of container, and for the rest of it the film, the work, generates its own set of demands and its own set of rules and finally if possible – and this is I think the very oldest kind of idea, not new at all – it consumes itself, uses itself up, leads to a stasis of some sort. I can't say precisely how the . . . well one begins to do something . . . I get to a point where I've done as much as I know how to do. Ok. So I then wait, and after a while something comes. What I tend to do is wait around for some kind of insight into how to do the next thing, you know, where does the insight come from? I don't know where it comes from, I'm not here to make explicit appeals to the muse or the angels, or what have you.

But it wasn't simply a question of, say, getting more and more ambitious and wanting to order larger and larger amounts of material. There are ways of doing that. But to find some way they would order themselves, that would have something to do with it, that would seem appropriate to my feeling. And my feeling is something which is partly genetic and has been generated partly by my own understanding of the medium and also the more distant tradition of the art that has moved me specifically, which may be genetic too. There are some things that appeal to you and some things that don't. I guess I, in some sort of way, know that some of those Egyptian things in the British Museum are great sculpture, but I mean I am unmoved by granite colossi. I may at the age of 70 be moved by granite colossi. I may have been moved by them at the age of 5.

PG: But that's the ultimate test, though, in that sense. What we're talking

about, the structural part: you can have a worked out structure, a construct, even to the point of substituting certain images for words, that whole business, and it still can be a terrible film or a great film. That's the thing.

HF: Yes, the degree of rationality involved in something is no guarantee at all. It's like sincerity. Sincerity presumably is some kind of *sine qua non*; it doesn't guarantee a goddamn thing. Most art is sincere and most art is bad. Perfectly rational . . .

PG: That's the problem of talking in art-critical terms. One may be rationalising all one wants and a film doesn't work. That aspect one can't deal with easily.

HF: I remember being one time on the 3rd floor of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and passing by Matisse's *Maroccans,* and there's a little old lady standing enraptured in front of it. A young girl went by, glanced at it, went on to Rouault, German Expressionist stuff, the Picassos, the whole tour of the 3rd floor, and YES she came back around and the little old lady was still standing enraptured in front of the Matisse. And she said to her, obviously stunned, '45 minutes ago I was here and you were standing here and you're still standing here, what is it that you see in this painting?' And the little old lady said 'Ah, my dear, it's plain that it requires a trained sensibility'. She wasn't insulting her. She was saying she had not reached that level of spiritual organisation.

PG: And verbalisation.

HF: Well, if you understand that phrase in its depth. Aristotle talks somewhere of six kinds of intelligence. And we've whittled it down to one kind of intelligence, right, goodness, being able to talk, to write something which is like talk. Being articulate. That leaves five kinds of intelligence as recognised by Aristotle shivering in the cold. Well, one of the kinds he talked about was *techne,* which is the kind that lets people make things, presumably good things. Well, we get *technical* from that. We say, 'That's merely technical.' But he didn't mean it as pertaining to craft, he meant it as the whole faculty of mind that makes it possible for a Brancusi to be able to march up to a billet of bronze and get the 'Bird in Space'. Whereas if I march up, whatever my powers are, to the same billet of bronze I get a pile of filings, essentially. Yet all, to my knowledge, Brancusi had to say in his whole life about sculpture was ten sentences. Something like that. None of which is what your art reviewer would recognise as rational.

It is obvious again to a person of trained sensibility or disciplined sensibility that Brancusi was an intelligent man, and we're not dealing here with a dumb or even a crafty Rumanian peasant. We're talking about an individual of extraordinary intelligence. So that you see . . . if each of us have six kinds of intelligence we could call a, b, c, d, e, f, then I make something with intelligence 'a' that is intended to be apprehended by you with intelligence 'a'. Something on channel 'e' intended to be apprehended on channel 'e'.

PG: But it's the *crossings* that are interesting. That's why *Zorns Lemma* works.

HF: Well, Ok. I mean they have wide penumbras. You don't dial the station by pressing a button. Presumably you're receiving on all channels all the time. Maybe I used the wrong figure. Here I am trying to use metaphor from radio rather than a cinema metaphor; a cinema metaphor is richer. I mean, we think of it as pictures with sound, but film has this whole tactile channel as well, this whole level of being so real you could touch it.

PG: And duration, which nothing else has.

HF: Yeah.

PG: I mean, your film has pieces of time, whether they're visual or verbal. The tensions come basically from the piece of time.

HF: I like your word 'duration'. That's a word which means something. When you say 'time', you're floundering . . .

PG: Of course.

HF: Duration is how long something lasts.

PG: From point a to point b.

HF: Something that is concretely measurable by counting the number of frames on the strip.

PG: The other thing is that it's not narrative. Point 'a' to point 'b' in *duration* as opposed to narrative. Because everything moves forward in time. That's an important distinction.

HF: Ok. What about time? Since so much of my work seems to deal with notions of time – it's something I've thought about. What are these views of time? There's time as the universal solvent. We're dropped on the surface of the tub, which is corrosive. We slowly rot away and sink down and disappear. Or: there's time as an elastic fluid. The frog Tennyson leaps into the elastic fluid and creates waves which ultimately joggle the cork Eliot. Or, in Eliot's view, the elasticity travels in both directions: tradition and individual talent. Eliot of course says that Eliot has changed Tennyson and that is clearly true. Or: there is the DNA model of time, the spiral in which it's possible in four dimensions to have every turn of the helix cross every other turn of the helix within one lifetime or some other finite thing. Or: Pound's view of time: the continuous co-presence of everything. That is essentially the view of time that the generation of the 80's comes down to.

PG: And then there's Beckett's view of time which could be the continuous co-presence of nothing.

HF: Which still amounts to the same thing. I don't know . . . there is anyway this – what would you call it? – this incubus that settles over any attempt to

think about time, time being itself a phenomenon like gravitation, radiation or what have you. There's a problem with that. That is that phenomena are directly sensible and the intellect can devise direct ways to measure them. '32 feet per second per second' is an expression about gravitation. Which leads me to suspect that time is not a fiction, you know, but simply without being a phenomenon nevertheless a kind of intellectable condition of perceiving all other phenomena.

PG: An unavoidable . . . *thing,* really.

HF: Well, but I mean it is the condition under which other phenomena proceed. I mean, if you say 32 feet per second per second then we're talking about rate and total duration and so forth, we're talking about conditions, or a condition under which gravitation can be spoken of.

PG: So how does that relate back now to *Zorns Lemma*? I mean, specific instances of pieces of time, which means also pieces of space . . .

HF: I think very specifically in *that* film I have made the cut in duration (the pointed sense of the passage of time) explicitly, a condition of perceiving everything that's going on in the film. That's one view of the matter. Of course, I've gone on with this black and white thing – the new films – to elaborate other possible views . . .

London, 24 May 1972

Notes on *Zorns Lemma*

Peter Gidal

1. A film which deals with authority, authoritarianism, in its restating of the Bay State Primer's rules, e.g. 'In *Adam's* fall, we sinned all', 'Thy Life to mend, God's *book* attend', 'The *cat* doth play, and after slay'. A, B, C, etc. The verbal notation, the indoctrination from childhood into disciplines, through language, logic, rhyme, repetition.

2. Images are substituted for letters; an analogous system is set up. Some of the images are linear (tying a shoelace, one notch at a time, until the whole shoe is tied; peeling an orange); some are non-linear (waves on the ocean coming and going and coming; fire); some are indeterminate (ground beef egressing from a meat grinder; fog from a smokestack filling the frame, then emptying, filling up again, etc.). The problem is whether or not setting up a new system is positivist, i.e. still a dictation of an analogous system wherein the initial alphabet is *used*. In other words, does one always think of the smoke image, for example, as a *substitute* for 'Q'? If one does, the alphabet's authority is merely resubstantiated (or trans-substantiated, a not unrelated metaphor).

3. The essence of *Zorns Lemma* is the attempt to break down the authority of language, that rationalistic 'truth' of the verbalised materiality and spirituality of existence. Thus whatever the result of question 2 posed above, the film still attempts a breakdown into images, non-logical, non-hierarchical, non-narrative ones. Images which are designated as meaningful only in that their presentation has been determined by the film-maker in a certain sequence. But there is no mystification, no illusionism, as to the reasonableness of the image-choice. There is no authoritativeness based on some mystique. There is no model set-up of what is 'correct' or 'incorrect', though the film does imply a moral system to the extent of its attempted destruction of a specific domination, namely that of language. Still, Frampton has set up a system which is open rather than closed in spite of first appearances.

4. The last third of the film is a 'continuous' sequence of a couple walking away from the camera. Unfortunately there are reel-ends and flare-outs (thus the continuity is only apparent). The reel-ends and flare-outs break the unity of duration. And time is the most important element of (the) film. The soundtrack has six women speaking in order, each one word, from a piece of

writing, 'On Light, or the Ingression of Forms.' This piece of writing is broken down, its logic contested, because the aural continuity of sound (speech) is, for the listener/viewer, determined by the *tone* of each woman's voice. And since they each take one word at a time (though in order) we cannot readily follow the logic of the sentence-content. We follow, instead, tonal continuity. Thus words 1, 7, 13, 19, words 2, 8, 14, 20, etc., relate tonally, though 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc., relate logically. If the piece selected by Frampton had been a non-obscurantist piece, an easy piece of prose, the system of understanding and its breakdown would have worked. As the piece takes several readings to understand, it is self-destructive in this context, and of Frampton's purpose. Even *one* voice reading *that* piece would have raised comprehension problems, and would have inculcated the intended (positive) frustration at not being able to grasp the represented meaning (verbally). Also, the dialectic between chopped-up time of the verbal and the supposedly continuous linear time of the images should have worked to a clear, precise, degree. The concept is clear, the working out of it too loose.

5. Frampton seems really concerned mainly with presenting pieces of time. Each letter of *Lemma* is one second long (there are some exceptions which are noticeable as such and thus tend to reaffirm the strength, the duration, the physicality of each piece of time). *Lemma* thus does, on that level, what Kurt Kren's *Trees* (1960) did: establish units of time (film time/real time) which take precedence over any content (representational or otherwise). Tight units of stretched space in time; piece of film, taut, at once conceptual and purely physically existent. Units determined at each end by a splice.

6. *Lemma* is a seminal didactic film, nevertheless; and a beautiful film. It persistently establishes non-narrative film as time-segmentation-material. It uses the represented (photographic) image in direct contact with the actual material time-reality of the film in a non-illusory manner: the alphabet's authority stands in *direct* relationship to the monotony, i.e. the (one second per letter) *consistency* of its presentation.

7. *Lemma* overcomes its own conventionally 'beautiful photography' through the precise, intense, simple structure. The film is a lesson (that is made clear). A didactic film and a space/time piece of importance. The only problematic is point 2. It hurts to have to realise this, because it strikes me as one of the best and most important films I've seen. It is a strong film.

December 1971

Letter from Hollis Frampton to Peter Gidal on *Zorns Lemma**

. . . Re: yr/ piece on ZL. & yr/ later surmise that it might have bugged me. No. I cannot, logically, get annoyed at anything a critic writes about my work. If you say something is wrong with my film, & you're *wrong*, time's pyramids will squat on yr/ remarks & obliterate them. If you're *right*, then of course it is up to me to correct the situation. (Hell's bells no, NOT change the specific work. I have a handy list . . . and I mean it's written down, as part of my current testament . . . of errors I *know* my work to contain, ranging from the grossest & simplest mechanical goofs in cutting, to precise moments when I blew the pivotal decision absolutely, where I aesthetically had my head up my ass so far I cd/ justly claim to see daylight ahead. AND: only two people have ever caught me out on any of them, that would be Ernie Gehr and Stan Brakhage. Neither of whom ever go back & change a film, in any particular.)

However, there are questions of detail to which I do care to reply in your piece. Such as:

A) yr/ point 2, with its question. I suspect you're 'trying too hard' here. Do *you*, in watching the film, keep tabs in the central section by cycling the Roman alphabet? I betcha you don't. IF one does that, then there's no way to go the rest of the way with the process. I have been asked, dozens of times, if there is any esoteric connection between the subset of 'images' & the alphabetic matrix. Of course there ain't. People have repeatedly tried to find one, & side tracked themselves clean out of the work. But (yr/ point 5) I shd point out that I am not in business to 'attempt to break down the authority of' anything. Language *has* its dominion. Until recently (1839) the only thing we cd/ trust that the dead left us was *words*, & we ain't gonna get out of that bind overnight, or via any single masterpiece. The rumour (anyway) that my mother's name was Rose Selavy is substantially correct, and I think she has something to teach us all about the intimacy of the ties between language and perception . . . on a level that goes a lot deeper than the Wiener Kreis wd/ have understood the word 'language'. If you mean the film attacks the authority of what Carnap & Co. wd/ call a 'predicate', I agree. Among other things. But of course 'verbal logic' is but a tiny wen or mole on the buttock of language, which I understand as a fundamental neural phenomenon among vertebrates, & probably living things.

*Some of the text of this letter has been omitted.

B) The work IS an *autobiography*. It is my own trip. It is meant to be interesting and amusing, as well as helpful (*aliter*, 'didactic'). Words dominated *me*. Now they don't. How did that happen? Waaaaal (he spits, hitches up his overalls, and sez vehemently), seems to me it went something like this . . . (undsoweiter).
C) Yr/ point 4. The film is meant to be seen, and *heard*, many times. That includes the text, *On Light*, etc. You consider the problems of making that section from what I might call a 'textural' point of view: you wd/ like it to be lapidary: a cabachon, let us say, in onyx. You are saying: HF has muddled the chemistry of the element cobalt, it is impure. But I ain't INTERESTED in the chemistry of cobalt, which is a fictional construction very much akin to your tyranny of words, since cobalt is no more found going its own way, chemically, in nature, than the world is filled with nouns adjectived, adverbially verbing one another. I am, in fact, interested in the chemistry of *dirt*. Yes: here in the West, we isolate things for study. Repeat: for *study*. It behooves us to keep in mind that we are studying convenient *fictions*, and very ingenious ones at that.

Or: more precisely: I want both the cobalt AND the dirt. I think the evidence for both is there.

D) yr point 5. The *plasticity* of time is what is at issue. Vide my remarks, *passim*, on time, in the Field interview. If the next AFTERIMAGE ever sees print.* The sort of interest in time you associate with me might be more accurately ascribed to Snow (in, say, ONE SECOND IN MONTREAL). But 'space' is more like Mike's specialty. It 'matters' like hell to me what is going on, in those bits of time, and on those bits of film. So that no good German would ever recognize me as a *sang-pur* & proper Formalist. Aw well, shucks folks, Bach said he made his works ad majorem gloriam Dei.

E) yr point 4. I offer to you only that I *own*, and owned in 1970 when the shot was made, a camera that will shoot 400′ at a single take, which is about the length of that shot . . . and that I was well aware, having planned that shot for a long time, what options were open to me . . . and so you may assume, with my authorization, that the reel-end flares are absolutely deliberate. In fact I held the individual rolls up and revolved them each in the sunshine, at loading and unloading, to make damn good and sure they got fogged. It was no unweighed gesture. Quite a bit was at issue. Part of it had to do with asserting the materiality of film, with spitting on the lens, cracking the illusion. Nothing would have been more inimical to my purpose there than slinging the Warholian hammock of real-time conundrums. I made a precisely measured *distance* from that.

Again, concerning the Grosseteste text: I *do*, and deeply, regret the hairy mechanical quality of the track, which mitigates against comprehensibility more, I think, than the hocketing. I hope to reprocess that tape, which was

**Afterimage* No. 4

made in poverty & under dreadful circumstances . . . to reprocess it electronically & get a new transfer . . . that MIGHT help. What interests me, in part, is this: how much of comprehension comes from channels other than the dictionary. The words, and their 'sense', are unchanged of course. But a large part of speech seems to be understood as you understand the phrase 'Shave-and-a-haircut' from a knock on the door: i.e., in ways that have little to do with The Verbal. When you're thrown back on comprehension of words themselves, it becomes difficult.

Surely there need be no traffic between you & me over grounds of objection to any work of art on a basis of its being 'difficult' to understand. We have exercised our minds on, for instance, Webern. Ef I'd of wawnted it to be easy, don't yew think I wud ov *made* it easy?

F) yr/ point 7. Concerning 'conventionally beautiful photography': precisely, it is a convention. It had to be 'normal' photography. Had I started smarming the whole thing up with incessant gross shifts in distance from a nominal illusionistic norm of rendering, the whole thing would have got bogged down in perceptual push-pull. *That* was the base-line, 'key' or '(bass) clef', of the whole thing. In fact, of course, most of the images *are* modified with respect to *time*.

E poi basta! this is all just thinking on paper about yr/ remarks. You're right, ZORNS LEMMA *is* a seminal didactic film. It *is* a masterpiece, if we still use that word. It is also a film I finished on 21 March, 1970, and I'm considerably more interested in what I'm doing *now*: about which there seems to be some cultural lag, as it were. And of course you're an artist . . . by which I mean that whatever criticisim you write has primarily to do with your own concerns as an artist. (Such as: my Paul Strand piece is of course by way of expounding HF's views on the phot/ image: I loathed that Strand show.)

I said to Sitney, at dinner in July: I have found your Structuralists, P. Adams, and they are in England. Complete to the diacritical mark, influence of Warhol, the whole number. You see, Peter, most of us to whom that tag has been stuck, are a little (or more than a little) exercised about it. & if some of the foregoing seems suspended near the point of irritation, it has to do with feeling myself condemned for nonconformity to a set of Laws that were extrapolated from work that I myself (among others) did in the first place. Personally, I believe Structuralism is a term that should have been left in France, to confound all Gaul for another generation. Now I'm by way of making some films (post-HAPAX LEGOMENA) which are not especially 'structural'. Am I then to be hung by my thumbs? discarded? or what-o? The new work is made, as all the other stuff has been, according to my possibly imperfect understanding of the classic canons and root necessities of my art . . .

25 August 1972

KEN JACOBS

Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son

Lois Mendelson and Bill Simon

Ken Jacobs' film, *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son,* is, with Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera,* one of the two great works of a reflexive cinema whose primary subject is an esthetic definition of the nature of the medium. Jacobs himself has called it 'a didactic film'.[1] It deals with several major critical areas: with representation, narrative and abstraction, with the illusions involved in the film-viewing experience, with the possible ways of handling space and time, with structure and with perception. It is, as well, a work of radical transformation; a primitive work from the earliest period of film history is transformed into a highly innovative work, modernist in character, constantly pleasurable to the eye and, at the same time, a sophisticated exercise in film and art criticism.

Jacobs, then, has taken an early American film called *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son,* a rendering of the nursery rhyme, and recreated it. He first presents the original film as it was made in 1905 (probably by Billy Bitzer, Griffith's great cameraman). Then, for 70 minutes, by photographing the original film while it is being projected, Jacobs performs an exhaustive analysis of it. Finally, he shows the original film in its entirety once again, adding a brief coda of his own.

The original film is 10 minutes in length and consists of eight tableaux or shots showing a crowd in pursuit of Tom and a stolen pig. All eight tableaux are photographed in a basically theatrical way – in long shot, with the camera placed front row centre. The space in each of the shots is shallow and is articulated in a very simple manner – with some use of groups and with some suggestion of receding space painted on the sets. There is also very little rhythmic articulation. Events either happen all at once and are difficult to distinguish or else are strung out at great length one after another.

The film has great charm, largely because there is a decorative quality to the painted sets and the costumes (supposedly modeled after Hogarth prints[2]) and also because there is so much close attention to detail. In the opening

[1] Ken Jacobs, Programme note prepared for showing of *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son* at the Gallery of Modern Art, New York, April, 1969.
[2] *The Audio/Brandon Film Catalogue* (Mount Vernon, N.Y., 1972/73), p. 380.

tableau, at the fair, there are acrobats, jugglers, many revellers, a fight between sailors, as well as the stealing of a pig – a tableau crammed with simultaneous activities. The subsequent tableaux follow the chase with each of the ten or twelve chasers individually jumping into haystacks, climbing out of chimneys, climbing over or through fences, all ending in a barnyard filled with ducks, geese, and flying birds.

From this, Jacobs has made a radically different film. Using the basic procedure of photographing the original film from a screen upon which it is being projected, he employs just about every strategy known to film. He photographs varied portions of the original shots, sometimes showing a shot in almost its full size, sometimes blowing up a very minute part of the original. He moves his camera along, up, down, into, and away from the original, in which there is no camera movement at all. He uses the freeze frame technique, stopping the original on any one frame for any period of time, then going back into motion. He uses slow motion, reverse motion, superimpositions, masks, and wipes. He adds black and clear leader, creates a flicker effect, and leaves in the circles and flares that appear at the end of reels of film. He photographs the film strip as such and sets his screen within a larger spatial context, creating a kind of screen-within-a-screen. He does shadow play with fingers against the screen while the film is being projected, and even photographs the light bulb of the projector. He also adds two colour sequences which do not appear in the original film. All of these strategies are employed both individually and in the most extraordinarily complex combinations. Jacobs sets up an extremely rich vocabulary and proceeds to employ it exhaustively, using the basic montage principle (the possibility of combining in any way) to create a completely new work.

In doing all of this, Jacobs is essentially involved in an analysis, a contemplation, of the original work. 'I've cut into the film's monumental homogeneity (8 statically photographed sets . . .) with some sense of trespass, cropped and given a Griffith emphasis to parts originally submerged in the whole – but (this is a didactic film) it was necessary to do so in order to begin to show how much was there.'[3] Very much attracted to the original film, he decided to show what interested him in it. His film is a revelation of the original, achieved by analysing, fragmenting, and abstracting the original and reconstituting it as a new film. In revealing what interested him in the original, Jacobs has revealed what interests him in film. And in so doing, he has created a discourse on the nature of film. He has created a film that deals with several major esthetic problems and preoccupations.

The 1905 *Tom, Tom* is both a representational and a narrative film. It depicts a world which has reference to people, places, and objects that we can recognize and it tells a story which we are expected to follow. Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom* is quite different. Because Jacobs subjects the images to so many radical alterations, they frequently lose their recognizability and attain varying degrees of abstraction. The point of reference both to the outside

[3] Jacobs, Programme note.

world and to the original film, disappears. A human body becomes patterns of lines, forms, and light and dark. Thus, Jacobs' film constantly oscillates between two kinds of images – the completely representational and the completely abstract, with all the varying gradations between representational and abstract also included.

In addition, there is a constant oscillation between narrative and abstract images. As long as enough of the original images is shown, the actions of the original film are recognizable. The audience can react to what is being seen in terms of actions, of a narrative. On the other hand, when Jacobs photographs a smaller part of the original film or otherwise distorts the image, the audience can no longer react in terms of actions.

Two points become clear in Jacobs' treatment of this problem. The first is the degree to which representation and narrative are inextricable. The reaction in terms of narrative, of following actions, depends on representation, on the recognizability of people and what they are doing, on the existence of a certain kind of space in which actions can happen.

The second point that is very clearly elucidated by Jacobs is that these two modes of art elicit different kinds of experience. As long as the images are representational and narrative, we are following the film in terms of actions, with interest in and attention to these actions. When the images are abstract, a very different response is called forth. We must adapt a much more contemplative attitude and see the film largely in terms of the interaction of form, line, light, movement. Jacobs forcefully demonstrates the differences in these two experiences by constantly oscillating between the two poles of representation and abstraction.

Jacobs is also very much concerned with another element in the film-viewing experience. He is concerned with exposing, through the systematic reduction of images, the two major illusions upon which the filmic image depends.

The first illusion concerns light. Because he photographs a film off a screen and because he photographs it so closely at times, the image is reduced visibly to various intensities of light and shadow. The fact that the filmic image always consists of varying intensities of light projected on a flat surface, the fact that film is really always a kind of shadow play, is revealed by the process of reduction.

Much of *Tom, Tom* can be seen in terms of Jacobs' preoccupation with the nature of light and dark, a preoccupation that he has demonstrated in areas outside of film as well. He has created a number of shows involving shadow play (live people behind a white screen) and the illumination of dark environments. He is fascinated by the Blackout of 1965, stating that he felt more secure in the truth of the Blackout than in the usual illusion of security.[4] It is possible to talk of his part of *Tom, Tom* as an 'illumination' of the original film, as bringing the qualities of the original 'to light'. Jacobs' inclusion of the flicker effect, of black and clear leader, of the flares and circles, of shadow play, of shots of the actual projector bulb, as well as his major exploration of the

light and dark areas of the original film, all attest to his interest in and revelation of the light potentialities of film.

The second illusion that is revealed in *Tom, Tom* is the illusion of movement. By using the freeze frame technique (holding any one frame for any period of time) and by constantly alternating frozen frames with moving images, Jacobs reveals that the film image consists of a series of unmoving, still images. (The illusion of movement is achieved by the eye combining the still images into movement through the persistence of vision.) As always in *Tom, Tom,* this demonstration is taken as far as it can go. For instance, Jacobs sometimes moves his camera over a frozen frame, complicating and reemphasizing the fact of the frozen frame by insisting at once on the lack of movement in the frozen frame and on the presence of movement, albeit illusory movement, because of the moving camera.

Jacobs also demonstrates a deep interest in the spatial potentialities of cinema. He explores this aspect by using as his model or point of departure, a primitive film with shallow, stage-type space, in which the camera is placed at a fixed distance from the subject and in which the only change of space is accomplished by a cut and a change of setting. He transforms this conventional concept of space by literally breaking down the spatial unity of the original and reconstructing from the fragments, a more radically filmic space.

He does this in a number of ways. For example, he is constantly compressing and expanding the space of the original film by juxtaposing the full range of shots from long shots which generally have deep space to extreme close-ups which are much flatter. He also juxtaposes moving images and frozen frames, taking advantage of the fact that a still of a moving image always appears to be flatter and therefore closer to the screen surface. Thus, the flat screen surface becomes a point of reference as the eye is drawn alternately towards and away from it. A tension is created between two-dimensional and three-dimensional space.[5]

Sometimes he demonstrates the process of this expansion and compression. In one sequence, involving the boy with the striped trousers, a series of stills of the boy is projected on the screen, each shot becoming progressively closer. Then, the still becomes a moving image, in slow motion, which flickers, and, at the same time, the camera begins a sudden and dramatic move forward into the picture. The movement continues until the black and white stripes are so close to the surface that they become flat black and white shapes, flickering and moving across a flat screen. In another sequence, the ladder-climbing sequence, the camera again moves into the picture until the magnification is so intense that the images appear to disintegrate into flat abstract shapes. Also, at this point, the grainy, pointillist texture of the image, evident throughout the film, is heightened to its magnificent best.

Still another point concerning the compression and expansion of space

[4]Jud Yalkut, *Critique 5*, The New York Free Press, New York, March 28 1968, p. 9.
[5]It is interesting to note that Jacobs is pursuing his investigation of spatial problems by experimenting with 3-D film.

should be made. In addition to creating a tension between two- and three-dimensional space, which Jacobs does throughout the film, in certain sequences, he generates a dynamic tension within the flat screen surface itself. There is one outstanding example of this – the most magnified portion of the ladder-climbing sequence. Here, the shapes press against one another as they move in slow motion around the surface and off the edges of the surface. Light areas react against dark ones, large shapes against small ones, curved lines against jagged ones, and negative planes against positive ones.[6] Altogether, this section is an exquisitely choreographed ballet of forms.

Another way in which Jacobs questions the spatial conventions of the original film is through experimentation with the notion of offscreen space. In the original, when the characters move off the screen, it is as though they walk offstage; their existence seems to stop at the edge of the screen. Jacobs, however, sometimes creates an awareness of space outside the limits of the screen. For example, one of the original tableaux shows three spectators watching people jump, one by one, out of a chimney. Jacobs shows a detail of these spectators in the act of watching but he excludes the spectacle which they watch. Thus, we are encouraged to fill in the missing images from our memory of the original film; the offscreen space is extended to our visual memory.

Later in the sequence, there is a shot which includes both the spectator and the spectacle. Now, both actions are 'onscreen'. Suddenly, the spectacle is 'wiped out', as if a black shade were drawn halfway down the screen and again the spectators appear to watch nothing at all. This time, however, the offscreen action is taking place behind the black wipe. That is, the offscreen space is now part of the visual field.

Still another variation on this theme takes place later in the sequence when we are again shown both the spectator and the spectacle. This time, a complete wipe occurs. The black shade is drawn down to the bottom of the screen, is lifted briefly, exposing the image, and is drawn once again, leaving us to contemplate blackness. Although we are seeing nothing but blackness, the action seems to continue through our memory image of the previous shot. Now, all of the action takes place in offscreen, or, more precisely, behind-screen space.

There are several other interesting ways in which Jacobs shatters the spatial unity of the original film in order to construct a spatial concept which is special to the film medium. In the scene in which the chasers break down the door to the cottage, for example, there is a long shot of the interior which perpetuates the stage space of the original. Suddenly, there is a cut to a shot in which both sides are masked and the remaining central figure is frozen. The effect is dramatic. The illusionistic stage space is radically compressed and the image resembles a flat wall upon which an oriental painted scroll is hung. But Jacobs does not end his spatial experiment here. Instead, he unfreezes the still image and with an explosive burst, the moving figures reacquire their volume and spill through the door, puncturing the flatness of the screen and creating an

[6]This section of the film seems to reflect the influence of Hans Hofmann with whom Jacobs studied painting for a period of time.

exciting tension between two- and three-dimensional space.

Another commentary on film space is contained in an extraordinary set of ten sequences which are scattered throughout the film and which we shall refer to as the 'screen-within-a-screen' sequences. In these, the screen we have been watching is suddenly reduced and set within a larger, black screen. Each of the ten sequences is different and each reveals, with varying degrees of complexity, the subtle relationship between the flat screen surface and the projected illusion of depth.

Several of these sequences shall be described here. In one, the small screen which is set within the larger one begins to jiggle and then moves quickly up, down, across, away from us, and back again, carving out a space for itself in the amorphous black field.

In another, the small screen shares one edge with the larger one. Its apparent diagonal intrusion converts what would have been simply a two-dimensional black surface into a dark, undefined suggestion of space.

The final screen-within-a-screen sequence to be described, perhaps the most spectacular of all, can be more easily visualized if we describe briefly the way in which the film was shot. The setup consisted of a transparent screen which was flanked on one side by a projector and on the opposite side by a camera facing the projector. As the original film was projected onto the screen from one side, Jacobs photographed it from the other side.

Keeping this setup in mind, one is better equipped to enjoy the subtleties of this sequence. This time, we see moving silhouettes which appear to be in front of the small screen-within-a-screen. A shadowy hand moves and turns up a corner of the small screen, jiggles it about, and then actually lifts it up, revealing the light bulb of the projector.

Like the other screen-within-a-screen sequences, this one deals with spatial ambiguities, but, in addition, it reveals the actual space in which this particular film was shot. And it goes still one step further – it extends into the space of the audience. We suddenly become conscious of ourselves watching an image projected upon a screen in which someone else is watching another image projected upon another screen. We experience not only the space between ourselves and the large screen but also the space, or, more precisely, the illusion of a space between the shadow man on the screen and the small screen-within-a-screen.

The short coda at the end of *Tom, Tom* involves the use of split screen. At first, the screen is split vertically into a black and a white panel. One panel is quickly replaced by a frozen frame and then by a moving, flickering sequence from a scene in the film. The other panel alternates between black and white in such a way that the eye is repeatedly bombarded by intense flashes and flickers. Although this section is extremely brief, it reiterates many of the spatial preoccupations of the film – such preoccupations as the tension between two- and three-dimensional space, the interaction of light and dark, and the juxtaposition of still and moving images.

Tom, Tom must also be studied in terms of Jacobs' treatment of time; it

illustrates the many ways in which time can be manipulated in film.

In the most general terms, Jacobs' section of *Tom, Tom* can be seen as a distension, largely through editing, of the original film. A 10-minute film has been made into a 70-minute film. There are several factors involved in this process, the most basic of which is the elaboration of certain sections or parts of the original. This elaboration is achieved through the use of all of the various strategies we have already discussed and through extensive use of the principle of repetition. The most extreme example of this is the stepladder sequence. In the original, it takes the whole group of chasers about 30 seconds to climb the ladder; this sequence is expanded to about 20 minutes by Jacobs. One part of this sequence – a woman with black dress and white trim who is climbing the ladder, followed by a man with white sleeves – lasts about one second in the original and becomes an extended 12-minute, almost entirely abstract, section in Jacobs' film. Basically, what is happening here is that Jacobs is taking a portion of the original, fragmenting it, treating the fragments in various ways, and reassembling them into a new whole.

This general process of distension is furthered by several other factors, most notably the addition of extraneous material like black and clear leader and the two colour sequences. It should also be added that within this overall pattern of distension, there is a minor pattern of contraction. Jacobs does not elaborate all of the material in the original film. While elaborating some of it at great length, he also completely omits other material, thereby illustrating the possibilities of ellipsis in film. In addition, Jacobs rearranges the order of the material within each of the original tableaux. In his treatment of the first tableau, for example, he starts with material in the middle, then goes back to material at the beginning (including the title), then treats material at the end. Interestingly, however, he maintains the order of the tableaux, never skipping back and forth between them.

Jacobs also illustrates the various kinds of temporal experiences possible with film. This is seen especially in his treatment of representation, narrative, and abstraction. As long as we have a clearly perceivable element of representation and narrative story-telling in the images, we tend to experience the passing of time in terms of the time of the events or actions seen. When the images become more abstract, this sense of narrative time begins to disappear, becomes much less pronounced. In the most abstract part of the ladder sequence, for instance, the sense of time of the original action, or of any actions, is completely lost and the time of Jacobs' film, the time in which the forms, lines, patterns of light interact, becomes paramount. In general, the extreme elaboration of a moment produces an extreme distension in which the sense of the duration of formal interaction, whether it be of line, form, and light or of edited pieces of film, becomes the predominant experience. This supremacy of film time can be illustrated with one more example – again with the use of camera movement over a frozen frame. The freeze frame absolutely stops, freezes, the time of the original film. The camera movement over the freeze frame produces a sense of evolving time, but the time, in this case, is the time of Jacobs' moving camera. It is Jacobs' newly created film time, not the

time of the original film or of narrative actions.

In his remaking of *Tom, Tom,* Jacobs also investigates the overall structure or composition of the film. The original version is arranged sequentially, in narrative order. It consists of eight shots, each separated from the other by a distinct cut. Jacobs dissolves this simple and rigid structure and constructs in its stead a much more intricate and fluid one. He includes the model in his reconstruction, so that what emerges can be viewed as a kind of triptych: the original *Tom, Tom* shown twice forms the two narrow side panels, Jacobs' version forms the large central panel, and the split screen section at the end can be seen perhaps as a 'misplaced' predella panel.

Like the side panels, the central panel is also divided into units. (These include the striped trousers sequence, the woman with the hoop sequence, the ladder-climbing sequence, and the abstract section within it.) However, these new units are of a radically different kind. Instead of eight long tableaux, there are now many units of varying lengths, often created by the isolation, magnification, and distention of small details taken from the original shots. In addition, the new units are freely interwoven and are combined without any regard to narrative development.

Although Jacobs systematically dissolves the basic structure of the original, his film is not an exercise in chaos. For one thing, he utilizes the triptych framework mentioned above. For another, in spite of the structural transformations which occur within the central panel, he retains certain aspects of the original organization, such as the movement from one tableau to another.

The special way in which Jacobs integrates the model into his structure is significant because it gives rise to a new dimension in film perception. Our viewing experience of the central panel is intricately linked to our memory of the first panel. When the figures or actions in the central panel are recognizable, one cannot help but identify them in terms of the original narrative arrangement. When we see the woman with the hoop, for example, we grasp our location in the original, our location, in fact, in someone else's film. During the long abstract sections, we are apt to lose our place in that other film, even though we have no difficulty following the flow of images in Jacobs' version. Whenever the images are recognizable, they serve as landmarks in an unfamiliar territory, as ever present reminders of the fact that the original film is literally the construction materials for the new film.

The memory image of the original is, in a sense, projected in our minds while we are watching the new film. That is to say, the original *Tom, Tom* is mentally superimposed upon our viewing experience of Jacobs' *Tom, Tom.* The model is thus continuously present in this unique manner, as a continuum of comparison to its own transformation.

In *Tom, Tom,* Jacobs presents a brilliant lesson in perception and perception-training. He shows us what to look for in the 1905 version of *Tom, Tom.* He selects for us those aspects of the film intriguing to him by isolating and magnifying details, by distending important moments. Those elements towards which he directs our concentration – formal elements for the most

part – tend to draw our attention away from the narrative. When he projects the original film once again at the end of his reworking of it, he is allowing us the pleasure of viewing it with our newly trained eyes. At the same time, he is heightening our awareness of how much we have just learned about visual perception.

But Jacobs' film is not only about what to look at in the primitive version of *Tom, Tom.* While one watches the unravelling of his visual analysis, one becomes aware of the fact that perception or perception-training is actually one of the subjects of the film. As P. Adams Sitney has pointed out, Jacobs retards the fictive development of the original and, through his process of elongation, induces an awareness of perception itself as a value and an esthetic experience.

It is clear that Jacobs does not expect the viewer to respond passively to his method of perception-training. He presents a rigorous course for the eye and he demands, in return, a great deal of visual work. The level of difficulty of perception demanded of the viewer varies throughout the film; at times, one can easily grasp what one sees, while at other times, the images and interactions of images are so quick, complex, and elusive that repeated viewings are necessary in order to comprehend them. With each viewing, one actually sees more. One becomes visually more sophisticated and more attuned to the multi-faceted potentialities of cinema. One emerges with a set of visual tools with which to perceive not only the original *Tom, Tom* and not only Jacobs' intricate reworking of it, but also film in general.

The second point concerns transformation. We have already stated that the entire film involves a major act of transformation, the transformation of the original primitive film into Jacobs' radically modernist one. Further, we have implied that in each of the areas we have discussed, there is an element of transformation – the transformation of representational and narrative into abstract, the transformation of the image to reveal the illusions behind it, the transformation of space, time, and structure.

What is especially important about *Tom, Tom* is that we always perceive the process of transformation. The film itself is an act of visible transformation, demonstrated in the film. We witness the stages between representation and abstraction, we experience the state of forming. Similarly, we see the illusory image in the process of dissolving into light and dark, the moving image become frozen.

The space is visibly changed, and we feel the shifts in kinds of temporal experience. The fact that all film involves some degree of transformation is made manifest in film in which the subject is the act or process of transformation.

Artforum, September 1971

Editor's note: This article is included mainly because its methodology is symptomatic of current 'misunderstanding', i.e. a marked anti-materialism and the fetishisation of process and idealisation of the formal in its weak sense. At issue also is the uncritical acceptance of pseudo-documentariness. I point this out because, while most of the other writing here hints at or tells of the problematics engaged and the contradictions which may operate, this article seems blind to such considerations, as is *Tom, Tom.*

MIKE DUNFORD

Four Statements

1. 'I studied at Goldsmith's where I began by making fairly straightforward sculpture and then moved into events and happenings. These experiences, coupled with an interest in the work of people like John Cage and Rauschenberg, had a definite impact on my early film-making. I began with four short films on 8mm – one of them is just of a person walking backwards and forwards in front of a wall for three minutes and another is a single take (again of three minutes) of a curtain blowing in the wind. I set up a context and allowed things to happen from there, without trying to influence the course of events too much.

'Feeling in the end that this sort of work was too simple and that I should get more involved in the processes of film-making, I started making films that originated with an idea that I'd then try to film and edit – pseudo-Antonioni impressionistic things: a girl walking across a piece of waste ground, an aeroplane flies over, a train goes past and she walks away. It wasn't narrative but it was still a manipulation of events. I then made a fairly informal film consisting of imagery of weeds which was then bleached, scratched and painted on. It's very much of an improvisation which happens to be very beautiful to watch. Stemming from this I did a lot of work rephotographing projected film and in this I've been influenced by the structural school of film-making.

'But I'm basically not very happy about making art-type films that aren't doing much more than maintaining the illusion that a capitalist society can continue to function as it is. I decided some time ago to involve myself in more directly political activity, using whatever talents I might have as a film-maker to that end. There was a film for the Claimants Union about unemployment – I was unemployed myself at the time – which has been shown at their meetings. It's one very long shot of people standing outside the labour exchange with an almost subliminal editing in every four seconds of imagery to do with wealth – consumer goods, Rolls Royces driving down streets and so on. The soundtrack is simply an unemployed person talking about the difficulties he was facing being unemployed. The aim wasn't to make a political statement (Liberation Films criticized the film for that reason) but rather to provide a catalyst for discussion. And as such it worked very well at the meetings, sparking off a lot of talk.

'I think that the kind of film that attempts to make a general political statement tends to be about politics rather than a political film and becomes just another kind of cultural product. It's important that the film deal with a very specific situation – say a strike in a factory – and be shown to the people involved in that strike, so that it functions as part of that strike. Although I've in fact reverted recently to my previous type of film-making I'm most interested in continuing in this sort of area, but it's a problem, finding other people to work with.'

Interview by John Du Cane, *Time Out*, 30 June 1972

2. Each film is a true experiment in the sense that the most useful features are those aspects that are failures.

The direction that my work takes is more likely to be affected by tangential results than any other.

Each time I make a film I see it as a kind of hypothesis, or a questioning statement, rather than a flat assertion of any particular form or idea.

Three years ago I was making poetic imagist film-statements. Now I see myself as attempting to re-investigate and re-create the film medium which I used then unconsciously.

Each film is a film experiment in the sense that the most attractive features are those that work.

My films are not about ideas, or aesthetics, or systems, or mathematics, but are about film, film-making, and film-viewing, and the interaction and intervention of intentive self-conscious reasoning activity in that context.

Programme notes, International Avant-Garde Festival, National Film Theatre, London, 1973

3. *Stiff Life with Pear*, 1974.

Still Life's, painterly preconceptions, space, flatness, context, movement, progressive reformalisation in fluid contexts.

A still life with a pear, lighted in a darkened space. The camera is focussed, and after remaining in the first position for one minute is moved to right or left every thirty seconds according to a prerecorded set of instructions. Centre section in which the pear is eaten. Third section in which the first instructions are repeated, but with the addition of a second person who eats the still life, the camera uses the instructions as basis for action, attempting to adapt them to the obstructive presence of the second person. A second soundtrack is added to the first in which the cameraman describes the actual actions that the camera makes.

The film operates dialectically, in that a prior structure was arrived at which denotes the operations to be performed by the camera and cameraman, and this, during the course of the film, interacts with the variables of the filming situation. A synthesis results which is a result of these two elements, and which

was arrived at during the course of the film.

The intention in this film was to deal with the act or intention to initiate a film, the prior structure for filming was limited to a simple time-base, the distortion of this as a result of other factors renders the process as well as the elements involved perceptible.

Catalogue notes, **Knokke 5th Experimental Film Festival**

4. I have been interested over the last year in the use of continuously recorded location sound as a means of rendering the visual element opaque, and to subvert its representational role (in the illusionist sense). The use of sound in this way produces a dialectic between what is seen and what is not seen, reflecting on the formalizing intent and its interactions within the initial filming situation. The visual information corrects and is re-corrected by the recorded sound and continuously renders assumptions about representational correspondence visible (both figuratively and literally). The difference between continuous and discontinuous, and two forms of discontinuous recording systems without an element of precise synchronization between the two, and yet used in conjunction with one another, generates the basis for a critique and analysis of the immediate recording situation. The intention is to produce a film which records, and is recorded recording itself – the process is not effaced within the content; the content is not effaced within the process.

On *Still Life with Pear*, **Bristol Independent British Cinema Festival, 1975**

PAUL SHARITS

Notes on Films

Paul Sharits

General Statement: 4th International Film Festival, Knokke Le Zoute

I am tempted to use this occasion to say nothing at all and simply let my films function as the carriers of themselves – except that this would be perhaps too arrogant and, more important, a good deal of my art does not, in fact, 'contain itself.' It is difficult for me to verbalize about 'my intentions' with the 'films' intentions' and with the 'viewers' intentions'.

This has nothing to do with 'pleasing an audience' – I mean to say that in my cinema flashes of projected light initiate neural transmission as much as they are analogues of such transmission systems and that the human retina is as much a 'movie screen' as is the screen proper. At the risk of sounding immodest, by re-examining the basic mechanisms of motion pictures and by making these fundamentals explicitly concrete, I feel as though I am working toward a completely new conception of cinema. Traditionally, 'abstract films,' because they are extensions of the aesthetics and pictorial principles of painting or are simply demonstrations of optics, are no more cinematic than narrative-dramatic films which squeeze literature and theatre onto a two-dimensional screen. I wish to abandon imitation and illusion and enter directly into the higher drama of: celluloid, two-dimensional strips; individual rectangular frames; the nature of sprockets and emulsion; projector operations; the three-dimensional light beam; environmental illumination; the two-dimensional reflective screen surface; the retinal screen; optic nerve and individual psycho-physical subjectivities of consciousness. In this cinematic drama, light is energy rather than a tool for the representation of non-filmic objects; light, as energy, is released to 'create' its own objects, shapes and textures. Given the fact of retinal inertia and the flickering shutter mechanism of film projection, one may generate virtual forms, create actual motion (rather than illustrate it), build actual colour-space (rather than picture it), and be involved in actual time (immediate presence).

While my films have thematic structures (such as the sense of striving, leading to mental suicide and death, and then rhythms of rebirth in Ray Gun Virus and the viability of sexual dynamics as an alternative to destructive

violence in Piece Mandala/End War), they are not at all stories. I think of my present work as being occasions for meditational-visionary experience.

Piece Mandala/End War

This work was made for an anthology of films the general theme of which was to be For Life, Against the War; the film was not completed in time to be eligible for inclusion in that anthology and thus stands on its own as a statement of that theme. Piece Mandala is not narrative drama; instead it is meant to provide a short but intense meditative experience. 'Meditative' implies suspension of linear time and spatial direction; circularity and simultaneity are basic characteristics of mandalas, the most effective tools for turning perception inward. In this temporal mandala, blank colour frequencies space out and optically feed into black and white images of one love-making gesture which is seen simultaneously from both sides of its space and both ends of its time. Colour structure is linear-directional but implies a larger infinite cycle; light-energy and image frequencies induce rhythms related to the psychophysical experience of the creative act of cunnilingus. Conflict and tension are natural to a yin/yang universe but atomic structure, yab/yum and other dynamic equilibrium systems make more cosmic sense as conflict models than do the destructive orgasms the United States is presently having in Vietnam.

(More truthfully, I had no idea of what I was actually doing while making Piece Mandala. My wife and I had been separated and I began the film immediately following our reconciliation; since then, in our unending attempt to understand what the film might mean, we have come to understand that that search – and then, the film – has been of the deepest significance in the reconstruction of our marriage. Only recently in Providence, while travelling with the poet David Franks, after awaking from nightmares and writing the following note to Frances, did it become clear to me that the film is properly dedicated to her: 'seeing, at last, your mind as it must be at times in unendurable anguish, a series of events leading to that sense of self as burden, artaud making art of it, misery, saw your minding of such in my own horror, shocked, shaking my head to get a feeling for what is dream and what is not, my head a crazy catalogue of images, classical symbols, cartoons of grief – but it is not always so and it is that lack of it which has to stand for joy in the absence of blessings – and there are, in rare instances, blessings and you are often there at those places and I have a total sense of sense and you "are" absolutely cream, having to step on plastic flowers, my mind bursting, blossoming – someday I will tell you my dreams when it is quiet and I am more willing to let the tragic have its due warmth – that comes later; now I am content that my dreams were dreams.')

N:O:T:H:I:N:G/From an Application for a Grant

The film will strip away anything (all present definitions of 'something') standing in the way of the film being its own reality, anything which would

prevent the viewer from entering totally new levels of awareness. The theme of the work, if it can be called a theme, is to deal with the non-understandable, the impossible, in a tightly and precisely structured way. The film will not 'mean' 'some'-thing – it will 'mean', in a very concrete way, 'no'-thing.

The film focuses and concentrates on two images and their highly linear but illogical images and their highly linear but illogical and/or inverted development. The major image is that of a lightbulb which first retracts its light rays; upon retracting its light, the bulb becomes black and, impossibly, lights up the space around it. The bulb emits one burst of black light and begins melting; at the end of the film the bulb is a black puddle at the bottom of the screen. The other image (notice that the film is composed, on all levels, of dualities) is that of a chair, seen against a graph-like background, falling backwards onto the floor (actually, it falls against and affirms the edge of the picture frame); this image sequence occurs in the centre, 'thig le' section of N:O:T:H:I:N:G. The mass of the film is highly vibratory colour-energy rhythms; the colour development is partially based on the Tibetan Mandala of the Five Dhyani Buddhas which is used in meditation to reach the highest level of inner consciousness – infinite, transcendental wisdom (symbolized by Vairocana being embraced by the Divine Mother of Infinite Blue Space). This formal-psychological composition moves progressively into more intense vibration (through the symbolic colours white, yellow, red and green) until the centre of the mandala is reached (the centre being the 'thig le' or void point, containing all forms, both the beginning and end of consciousness). The second half of the film is, in a sense, the inverse of the first, that is, after one has passed through the centre of the void, he may return to a normative state retaining the richness of the revelatory 'thig le' experience. The virtual shapes I have been working with (created by rapid alternations and patterns of blank colour frames) are quite relevant in this work as is indicated by this passage from the Svetasvatara Upanishad: 'As you practise meditation, you may see in vision forms resembling snow, crystals, smoke, fire, lightning, fireflies, the sun, the moon. These are signs that you are on your way to the revelation of Brahman.'

I am not at all interested in the mystical symbolism of Buddhism, only in its strong, intuitively developed imagistic power. In a sense, I am more interested in the mantra because unlike the mandala and yantra forms which are full of such symbols, the mantra is often nearly pure nonsense – yet it has intense potency psychologically, aesthetically and physiologically. The mantra used upon reaching the 'thig le' of the Mandala of the Five Dhyani Buddhas is the simple 'Om' – a steady vibrational hum. I've tried to compose the centre of N:O:T:H:I:N:G, on one level, to visualize this auditory effect.

From a letter to Stan Brakhage, late spring 1968: 'The film is "about" (it is) gradation-progression on many different levels; for years I had been thinking that if a fade is directional in that it is a hierarchical progression, and that that exists in and implies forward moving "time", then why couldn't one construct inverse time patterns, why couldn't one structure a felt awareness of really going through negative time? During the final shooting sessions these past few

months I've had Vermeer's "Lady Standing at the Virginals" hanging above my animation stand and have had the most peculiar experience with that work in relation to N:O:T:H:I:N:G (the colons "meant" to create somewhat the sense of the real yet paradoxical concreteness of "nothing" . . . as Wittgenstein so beautifully reveals). As I began to recognize the complex interweaving of levels of "gradation" (conceptually, sensually, rhythmically, proportionately . . . even the metaphoric level of subject making music, etc.) in the Vermeer I began to see what I was doing in the film in a more conscious way. I allowed the feelings I was getting from this silent dialogue between process of seeing and process of structuring to further clarify the footage I was shooting. I can't get over the intense mental-emotional journeys I got into with this work and hope that the film is powerful enough to allow others to travel along those networks.

'Light comes through the window on the left and not only illuminates the "Lady at the Virginals" but illuminates the subjects in the two paintings (which are staggered in a forward-reverse simultaneous progression – creating a sense of forward and backward time) hanging on the wall and the one painting on the inside lid of the virginal! The whole composition is circular, folds in on itself but implies that part of that circle exists out in front of the surface. What really moved me was the realization that the light falling across the woman's face compounded the light-gradation-time theme by forcing one back on the awareness of (the paradox of) awareness. I.e., one eye, itself dark, is half covered with light while the other eye is in shadow; both eyes are gazing directly at the viewer as if the woman is projecting music at the viewer through her gaze (as if reversing the "normal" role of "perception") . . . I mean, the whole point is that the instrument by which light-perception is made possible is itself in the dark.'

POSTSCRIPT: Interrelated proportions welded into a formula consisting 'of terms, some known and some unknown, some of which were equal to the rest; or rather all of which taken together are equal to nothing; for this is often the best form to consider'– Descartes.

Notes on *Word Movie*

Peter Gidal

Seems to be about the impossibility of two systems (speech and vision) working at once, the impossibility of a coherent, rational, logical system of language (especially when fused with vision). So in a sense what he is concerned with is a negation of the traditional notion of logics, truth, rationality, intellectual certainty. The soundtrack is two people, a man and a woman, speaking totally clear, rational functional statements, but alternating one word apiece, and we are driven to attempt to clarify what each (or one, at least) is saying . . . but it is nearly impossible to keep one's verbal capacities 'focussed' on one person without letting the other's statement interfere. At the same time there is a visual treatment which is of many words in no apparent logical order which in turn interferes with the listening/comprehending capacity we are using. And the varying colours/tonalities of the background to the letraset-words makes for again a nuance of difference in our response to what we are presented with. The whole thing is very short (due to lack of the main element of film-in-depth: *duration*) . . . it does manage to make the point (rather humorously, I might add). In fact most philosophy has this element of humour except that most philosophers don't notice it. They don't seem to notice that their apparently rational attitudes and interpretations are usually at least 50 per cent right at best and thus 50 per cent wrong also. As Beckett said, in reference to Christ and the two thieves: 'One was spared, one was not. Not a bad percentage.' Funny at the same time, these obsessive, neurotic philosophers (noble though they be!), trying to grasp everything and in reality setting forth tiny, limited theories which encompass little more than their own individualistic fears and hopes . . . therefore the humour and the pathos of their attempts. And Sharits' film is doing a similar thing; it is the shortness of the venture that points out the humorousness, the obviousness (and paradox) of the humour of his approach at the same time as we see that he is totally serious in what he is trying to present. Affirmation of the impossibility of affirming clearly, rationally, either image or spoken word . . . or spoken word visualised (on screen). Sharits here deals with impurity, impossibility of non-interference of various levels of perception (visual, verbal, etc., etc.) . . .

Notes on Film, London College of Printing, April 1972

DAVID CROSSWAITE

Notes on Crosswaite's films

Peter Gidal

Films numbered '1', '2', & '3/, 'A', & 'B' '. Crosswaite, like the best English film-makers, can be labelled a 'structuralist', though this definition limits too severely the various aesthetic concepts at work. 'Film No. 1' is a ten minute loop film. The systems of superimposed loops are mathematically interrelated in a complex manner. The starting and cut-off points for each loop are not clearly exposed, but through repetitions of sequences in different colours, in different *material* realities (i.e. negative, positive, bas-relief, neg/pos overlay) yet in a constant rhythm (both visually and on the soundtrack hum), one is manipulated to attempt to work out the system-structure. One relates to the repetitions in such a way that one concentrates on working out the serial formula while visually experiencing (and enjoying) the film at the same time. One of the superimposed loops is made of alternating mattes, so that the screen is broken up into four more or less equal rectangles of which, at any one moment, two or three are blocked out (matted). The matte-positioning is rhythmically structured, thus allowing each of the two represented *images* to flickeringly appear in only one frame-corner at a time. This rhythm powerfully strengthens the film's existence as selective reality manipulated by the film-maker and exposed as such. The mattes are slightly 'off'; there is no perfect mechanical fit, so that the process of the physical matte-construction by the film-maker is constantly noticeable, as one matte (at times of different hue or different colour) blends over the edge of the matte next to it (horizontally or vertically). The film deals with permutations of material, in a prescribed manner, but one by no means *necessary* or logical (except within the film's own constructed system/serial).

The process of looping a given image is already using film for its structural and abstract power rather than for a conventional narrative or 'content'. But it is the superimposition of the black mattes which gives the film its extremely rich texture, and which separates it from so many other, less complex, loop-type films. Crosswaite works, in this film, with two basic images: Piccadilly at night and a shape which suggests at moments a 3-D close-up of a flowerlike organic growth or a Matisse-like abstract 2-D cutout. Depending on the colour dye of the particular film-segment and the positive/negative

interchange, the object changes shading and constantly *re*-forms from one dimension to the other, while shifting our perceptions from its reality as 3-dimensional re-presentation to its reality as cutout filling the film-frame with jagged edged blackness. Utilizing the same principal aesthetic concerns, Crosswaite's *Film No. 2* has as its ostensible subject Buster Keaton, filmed and refilmed off 8mm, off a TV screen, and again mathematically (though not linearly or simplistically) structured. The dyeing of the film in colours is never set up in a pattern suggesting some sort of logical progression or constancy; on the contrary, the viewer only at first reacts as if this were the case (colour narrative), but eventually is forced to realise and deal with the film's colours for what they are and not in terms of ultimate 'design' or 'purpose'. The films are non-climactic.

Programme notes, National Film Theatre, London, September 1973

Puddle and *A Film*

In 1968 David Crosswaite made his 8mm film *Puddle*. It serves as the basis for his *A Film* in 1971. *Puddle* deals with the given subject (a minimal and transitory one, as unsubstantial an essence as possible) in a variety of ways. Crosswaite utilises the camera-mechanism for inherent possibilities of f/stop (light) and film-speed variances. Clouds are reflected in the mirror-like 'subject' of the film: water. Grey clouds in grey water on grey ground on grey film. The clouds move at various speeds from left frame-edge to right frame-edge. The frame is a stable (static) enclosure to the film's ostensible content, but the *how* is much more relevant than the *what*. Speeds of motion combine with changing light-intensity in a manner which makes the film the axis of two inconstant (manipulated) variances: time and light. The emotional and conceptual tension (if such a separation indeed exists) relies on structural combinations of these obviously manipulated mechanistic functions. Various repetitions of above-mentioned procedure *endure*: the film consists of just that, as well as a pigeon by the puddle reflected (right side up or is the film upside down?). The constructed nature of the event, in duration, plus the blatant 'documentary' (deadpan) stare makes for a film which is both procedurally experimental (and interesting as such) and cinematically mature. *A Film* (1971) develops along these lines and simplifies these intentions into four basic, rhetorical devices; right side up negative, right side up positive, upside down negative, upside down positive. The newer film is more didactic, simplified, and each segment is handled in a cooler, greyer tonality wherein positive greyness and negative greyness become *virtually* indistinguishable. All the while, with gentleness and irony, the pigeon (five years after the 8mm version, the pigeons and the puddle look the same) walks along the bottom frame-edge at various speeds (depending on camera-speed), reflected in the water, closing the gap between pseudo-objective empiricism (i.e. 'real' information) and a material reality, the actual film formed from conceptualised 'intuition'. (In terms of humour the closest analogy would be Joyce Wieland's similarly indefinable funny superb little relativistic film *Sailboat* (1967).) Crosswaite's *Puddle* and *A Film* as well as his brilliant *Film No. 1* (1970) situate themselves squarely between the requirements of a formal abstractionist cinema of rhythm and (dis-)continuity and concretely constructed structural minimalism.

From an article in *Art and Artists*, December 1972

Interview with Peter Kubelka

Jonas Mekas

About the Irrelevancy of this Interview

Jonas Mekas: Should we concentrate specifically on your latest film, *Unsere Afrikareise,* or should we also talk about the European avant-garde?
Peter Kubelka: No, I cannot talk about the European film avant-garde at all, because there is nothing there that I respect. When you transcribe this interview, you should state that nothing I say has anything to do with my films. I have, I feel a very great need to communicate. I work hundreds and hundreds of hours for one particular minute in my films, and I could never produce such a minute by talking. I want, therefore, my talk to be completely irrelevant. Because, otherwise, it might just spoil what I have to say through my films. The real statement that I want to make in my world is my films. Everything else is irrelevant.
Jonas: You mean, there is nothing that we can say about *Unsere Afrikareise* at all?

Films – Documents for the Future Generations

Kubelka: Yes, we can talk. There are certain things that could be said. For instance: What I had in mind, with *Unsere Afrikareise,* was to leave a document for the future generations, when all this our life will be over . . . I thought this is a document. Of course, it may seem like a poem. Of course, it has very lyrical form – but this is document, too. My film is a *document for future generations.** There is nothing that has to be said with it. It just can't be said.

Jonas: It is interesting that Andy Warhol, too, considers his films – even films like *Sleep* – as documents for the future generations. Once he said to me: Wouldn't it be great today to have films made in the year 1266 – a film of a man's shoulder, for instance, or his ass, to see how differently people looked 700 years ago.

*All italics mine. *Editor.*

Kubelka: Did he say that? Yes. It's true. Then there is a second thing that I would like to say. I work for this living generation. I want to help in aging mankind, to get it away from the stone age. Make it adult. I feel that mankind is still a very young child – if you can make such a comparison. I feel that the age of mankind now is that of a very young child. For example, it just begins to be articulate. These are the first stages where it's articulate. It's beginning to have a memory. History is very young. What we call history is not history but very subjective statements of single beings and not right at all, and very mystic and mysterious. Mankind is now just in the process of growing up a little bit, slowly, slowly. My films have a function (this goes for the African film) – I play with the emotions and try to tear the emotions loose from the people, so that they would gain distance to their emotions, to their own feelings. This is one of my main tasks: *to get distance to the whole existence,* you see . . . I have a lot of distance. I always had it, and I have too much, so I feel very lonely and I want to communicate. You see, you have this whole range of emotions and these mechanisms, how the emotions are created. When you see certain images or hear certain sounds you have certain emotions. So I must always cry when I see moving scenes, when I see the hero getting the first prize for the biggest round and they play the national anthem . . . I have to cry . . . or when they bury somebody, I have to cry. At the same time, I am angry at myself, because I know that it's just the emotional mechanism. So, with the African film, I do a lot of this, I trigger a lot of those mechanisms at the same time and create a lot of – at the same time – comic feelings, sad feelings.

The Multiple Meanings of Image and Sound in Unsere Afrikareise

Jonas: Like the lion's death scene, when they are dragging him up on the truck – I think this is one of the saddest scenes I have ever seen. Or death of the giraffe – they are both very sad. They are pulling up this poor dead lion, and it's difficult to pull him up; it is a very sad shot. And the giraffe dies, falling on his side, and we hear this laugh, like sides splitting from laughing, I'm dying . . . these multi-level feelings.
Kubelka: This is achieved through the perfect synchronization of the music, did you notice that?
Jonas: Yes.
Kubelka: They move all in rhythm. There are many things that are not noticeable on first few viewings at all.
Jonas: *Or the eye, when the dying lion lifts his eye and looks directly into the camera accusingly and forgivingly and then dies. If there is a great moment of cinema, this is one.*

Economy in Cinema: Frame by Frame Film-making

Kubelka: Did you hear the music? When the lion looks at the camera, the music says (he sings): 'You look at me, and I watch thee . . .' – this comes together, then. And this brings up the question of economy. When you have the public sitting there, you have a very short time that they are looking at you,

and you must consider that the senses of the people now are the senses of the stone age: hunters and gatherers. They just have the senses to survive. Human beings are not in a position to sit and be interested. All their senses have survival reasons. So you must count on the audience, which sits there and will only be attentive to things that they are vitally interested in, or they will give you just a certain amount of time. So, when you really want to communicate, you must be very economical with every part, and with every second. For me, film is the projection of still frames. My economy is one single frame and every part of the screen. So I feel that every frame that is projected too much makes the whole thing less articulate. So I always work in frames. Even the African film, which doesn't seem to be like that, because it's very natural, is worked frame by frame. I have twenty-four communication possibilities per second, and I don't want to waste one. This is the economy. And the same is with the sound. Because one of the major fields where cinema works is when sound and image meet. So, the meeting of every frame with the sound is very important. That means, you must have the same economy with sound as you have with the image.

Jonas: Let us suppose, one reasons this way: If we accept the proposition that we are still in the stone age, and if we now say something to these stone-age people in a sentence that is so concentrated and distilled, that every sound, every word, every letter in it means something – do you think they will understand it? Isn't it better to divide the message that you want to put across into five sentences? So that they would get it, in the long run? Because you say, you want to communicate; and you don't want to waste a single frame?

Kubelka: You see, I don't make any distinction between myself and others. I don't say, 'The others are in the stone age, and I am not.' I am in the stone age as well as the others. So, if it works for me, it should work for everybody.

Jonas: I see. That places everything in the proper perspective. Even *Unsere Afrikareise* is a stone-age product.

Kubelka: Yes, I try to get myself and everybody else away from the stone age. But you see, when you say that perhaps I should give more time to people – I do this through repetition. I want my films to be viewed many many times. (A note in the Film-Makers Cooperative *Catalogue* says that, when rented, each of Kubelka's films should be projected twice. On reels, there are two prints of each film spliced side by side – to help the projectionist. – Jonas.)As I work a long time on my films, I don't want to lose them, I am not like many other artists who say, Oh, I made this long ago, and I have overcome it, and I don't like it anymore. I can still see all my films, even the very first one. Everything that I do must be so clear and dry and . . .

When is a Film Completed?

Jonas: Yes, we find this in cinema very often. Film-makers dislike or are indifferent to their early work. But we don't find this in poetry, for instance. A poet can write a poem, put it somewhere, and come back to it ten years later, after four volumes of his poems have come out, and say, Isn't it fantastic? Did

I write it? It's so perfect. Or he may change a word or a comma or two. But not in cinema. The cinema doesn't yet have its working tradition and is still full of all kinds of inhibitions and paranoias: You can't do this, you can't do that . . . The tradition in poetry is that the poet perfects his poem before he lets it go, even if it takes his lifetime – but not in cinema. In cinema, the release time is dictated more by festivals than perfection.

I think there is something more to your concentrated messages than the wish to communicate. I think we always have two kinds of artists: the emotion – and the intellect, reason. You are on the side of intellect and reason; Jack Smith is on the side of emotion. In your art, everything has to have a 'reasonable' meaning, otherwise you don't put it in. To Jack, he may put it in, even if he doesn't see the meaning, he may feel there is something to it anyway because it's beautiful. Even *Brakhage is more emotion than intellect, despite his writings, which are dominated by intellect* – although I am not so sure about that either.

Kubelka: I have been, in this sense, always very naïve. I consider myself a naïve artist.

Jonas: So what are the others? . . . The others are primitives? . . .

Kubelka: Yes . . . What did we talk about? . . . What would they like to know?

Jonas: I don't know. My trouble is that I don't want to know much about anything. I prefer to make things or look at things. But to some people it's helpful. I guess, I also am a garbage collector.

Kubelka: You think there is something in the African film that we could talk about?

Jonas: I have seen it only four times, so . . .

Kubelka: Twelve times is the beginning . . . Whenever I say something about my own work, I am always taken very seriously, because I am the person who says it. And I don't want that at all. I mean, what I say must be taken as a sort of chattering in the evening but not as a statement to go with my films. I want my films to be just alone. Of course, I am very happy if someone else says something. I have so many layers of meanings in my films that, of course, when I talk about one or two meanings, they may think that all the others are not important, and I don't want to give more weight to one layer and less to the other.

On Editing and on How The Frames 'Hit the Screen'; on Metric Rhythm

Jonas: It's interesting that the films that you brought back from the West coast are going into the same direction as yours. Like Bruce Lane's film. It is, no doubt, still very naïve, but its language has already a degree of condensation and crispness that stands out. Another similarity: It's an edited film. You have noticed, probably, that the West coast film-makers in general, are more interested in post-shooting editing than those of the East coast. They edit their films.

There was a discussion, at the New York Film Festival, and Annette Michelson said that Brakhage's cinema or way of making films is like an

extension of abstract expressionism, like De Kooning; that his art is not structured, etc.; it's action filming. And I said, at that time, that Brakhage's structuring of his films takes place inside of him – he has worked on it for many many years – so now his camera is like an extension of his body and is governed by the inner structuring – really, emotion, mind, and intuition blend together, and the hard work is not always on the editing or structuring table – *Songs* were structured in the camera. Brakhage did not begin his life as an artist the moment he pushed that 8mm button – he has been working on himself for years and years. Don't you think his method is a complete opposite of your method?

Kubelka: I esteem Brakhage's work very highly. And, for him, that's enough. But, for the imitators, it's not enough. It may not even be always enough for him.

Jonas: But then, *Dog Star Man* is an 'edited' film.

Kubelka: *I think Brakhage is very concerned with construction. He edits. I hope I have inspired him toward this,* and I would very much like to see what comes out. He has inspired me very much in what concerns his EYES, his EYES – what comes through the lens, how he leads his lens. Really, it's something. He's an eye-opener, so to say.

This is a very interesting problem. Because even if you don't edit the film, the precision and the economy might be there. It might be – I mean. If the person who makes it has really the power to be articulate. All the same, I feel I can do more when I compress my material. I like these concentrates. You see, there is a very essential point for me: I always want to enjoy what I do. I look thousands of times at what I do. I want to give to myself these very very rich seconds, and I enjoy these minutes very much. There must be a lot of essential pleasure just in the films when they hit the screen – I heard this expression yesterday, 'to hit the screen,' that's fantastic, in English. Hit the screen – this is really what the frames do. The projected frames hit the screen. For example, when you let the projector run empty, you hear the rhythm. There is a basic rhythm in cinema. I think very few film-makers – if there ever was one, I don't know – have departed making films from this feeling of the basic rhythm, these twenty-four impulses on the screen – brrhumm – it's a very metric rhythm. *I thought, the other day, that I am the only one who ever made metric films, with metric elements.* These three films, *Adebar, Schwechater,* and *Rainer,* are metric films. You know what I mean by metric? It's the German expression 'Metrisches System'. The classic music, for instance, has whole notes, and half notes, and quarter notes. Not frames as notes, but the time sections that I have in my films. I mean, I have no seventeenths and no thirteenths, but I have sixteen frames, and eight frames, and four frames, and six frames – it's a metric rhythm. For example, people always feel that my films are very even and have no edges and do not break apart and are equally heavy at the beginning and at the end. This is because the harmony spreads out of the unit of the frame, of the $\frac{1}{24}$th of the second, and I depart from this ground rhythm, from the twenty-four frames, which you feel, which you always feel. Even when you see a film by DeMille, you feel it prrrrr as it goes on the screen.

On the Essence of Cinema

Jonas: Some people say, Cinema is Movement; some others say, Cinema is Light. Do you have anything to say on the 'essence' of cinema?
Kubelka: Cinema is not movement. This is the first thing. Cinema is not movement. Cinema is a projection of stills – which means images which do not move – in a very quick rhythm. And you can give the illusion of movement, of course, but this is a special case, and the film was invented originally for this special case. But, as often happens, people invent something, and, then, they create quite a different thing. They have created something else. *Cinema is not movement. It can give the illusion of movement.* Cinema is the quick projection of light impulses. These light impulses can be shaped when you put the film before the lamp – on the screen you can shape it. I am talking now about silent film. *You have the possibility to give light a dimension in time.* This is the first time since mankind exists that you can really do that. To talk about the essence of cinema, it's a very complex thing. Of course, when you ask what's the essence of music, you can say one thing, and another, and another – there are many things in cinema. One is this great fascination that light has on man. Of course, cinema is still very flimsy, a pale thing, and it passes quickly, and so on – but still, as weak as it is, it is a very strong thing, and it has a great fascination just because you can do something with the light. Then: It's in time. It can be conserved, preserved. You can work for years and years and produce – as I do – one minute of a concentrate in time, and, ever since mankind existed, you never could do such a thing. And then – sound. The meeting of sound and image. And we come to this problem: Where does film become articulate? When does a language become articulate? Language becomes articulation when you put one word and another word. One word alone is one word alone, but, when you put two words, it's between the two words, so to speak, that is your articulation. And, when you put three words, it's between one and two, and between two and three, and then there is also relation between one and three, but two is in between.
Jonas: *For Eisenstein it was collision,* to you it's . . . ?

It's Between Frames Where Cinema Speaks

Kubelka: Yes, it can be a collision. Or it could be a very weak succession. There are many many possibilities. It's just that Eisenstein wanted to have collision – that's what he liked. But what I wanted to say is: Where is, then, the articulation of cinema? Eisenstein, for example, said it's the collision of two shots. But it's very strange that nobody ever said that *it's not between shots but between frames.* It's between frames where cinema speaks. And then, when you have a roll of very weak collisions between frames – this is what I would call a shot, when one frame is very similar to the next frame, and the next frame, and the next frame, and the next frame, and the next frame – the result that you get when you have just a natural scene and you film it . . . this would be a shot. But, in reality, you can work with every frame.
Jonas: In *Afrikareise,* you had this shot, you see a river behind the trees, the

trees, and whatever animal there is, in the river, slowly rising, a small action spot behind the trees, and nothing else really happens – it was the longest shot in the film, it went for something like ten seconds. Almost a Warhol shot . . .
Kubelka: Yes, the crocodile shot. But this was on purpose. You see, I broke up this thing with *Schwechater*. The *Schwechater* was the first film that worked with the event of the frame. *Schwechater* film is very strong, strong, very strong optical event. And what is it? Just people drinking beer.
Jonas: Have you seen Len Lye's fifty-second automobile commercial? Nothing happens there either, except that it's filled with some kind of secret action of cinema.
Kubelka: Yes, I saw it in 1958. *Schwechater* was finished already by then. And then, this feeling, I never lost this frame-by-frame film-making. Also in the *Rainer,* I did it. And in the *Afrikareise*. But what I wanted in *Afrikareise* was to create a world that had the greatest fascination on the spectator possible. This world had to be very naturalistic, so that you could really identify and enter it. It's, therefore, that I want a big screen for it, so you can see the blood and the elephants and the women and the Negro flesh and all the landscapes. This was one thing. And the other thing was that I wanted to have it so controlled as if I had painted it or made up myself and I achieved that through this immense, immense, long work of thousands of hours of cataloguing the whole material practically frame by frame. So there is this continuous correspondence between sound and image. After you see the film twelve or twenty times, then you notice that practically every optical event corresponds to the acoustic event.

The Sound in Unsere Afrikareise

Jonas: Even that ten-second shot where we have . . . how many frames do we have? Almost 500 frames . . . after the fifth and sixth time, I may be noticing the sound, what it does, because as it was now, the first four times, I was watching most of the time the image . . . At least, I have no memory of the sounds in that scene.
Kubelka: Yes, there is sound. You hear the shot, and it makes a 'puff' and misses the crocodile. But a bird flies. And then the man says: 'Geh!' He is disappointed and amazed, you see. Then it makes again PUFF – and then he hits, you see the crocodile is hit, and he says 'Na also!' that is, 'Oh, finally!' 'Nun also,' 'Na also,' which could mean, if translated, 'Finally, you did it.' And he says it in a very . . . it could be meant for a completely different event. Like, for example, the zebra is hit mortally, and you hear a woman's voice who says 'Auu!' as if a mosquito had just given her a little bite.
Jonas: Yes, I noticed that. I think it was during the third viewing that I really noticed that, and it was very funny, and sad.
Kubelka: But there are many hundreds of such things. I never want to make a funny scene, or a sad scene – I always have these . . . I want them very complex, never one single feeling but many many feelings always. So, of course, it's funny, and, then, it's not funny at all, because, for the zebra, it's a tragedy, and you pity her. Then you have that other scene. Before the zebra appears, you

have this mysterious, my miracle shot of the moon where you see first this long fruit, brown, and it has a very phallic form, and then it dissolves (but it's not a dissolve, it's just changing of focus) into the moon, this beautiful white moon, and then you hear this voice of the everything-knowing German professor of something that says 'Die Erde', 'The earth'. But it's not the earth, it's the moon! And then both say, in chorus: 'Die Erde ist terra,' ('Earth means terra') – they bring in their Latin . . . and then, when you hear 'terra', – cut – and you see the terra, you see the dying zebra lying on the terra. You see then the real terra, then. It's black and grey and burned. And they shoot the zebra for the sixth time, because zebras don't die, you have to shoot them many times, because they have such a hard life, you see. And then she (zebra) says: 'Auu.' And the man says: 'Aufstehen!' – 'get up!' – and this is a reminiscence of the Bible, I often have such references . . .

Jonas: Lazarus?

Kubelka: Yes. It's exactly that. I have something like that in my first film also. The voice says, 'Steh auf und geh!' meaning 'Rise and walk'. And then he says something about Jesus, he says, 'Ich bin auch nur ein Beamter,' which means 'I am also nothing but an employee'. I don't know, it's very difficult to talk about that, but it has to do with my childhood, my Bible reading, and Jesus, what he did, and so on, and I always imagined him as an employee of his Father, and so he says so in this film. Also, in the African film, there are some things that relate to the Bible in image and meaning. One is this 'Aufstehen'.

The Control of the Colour, and the Moments of Standstill

Jonas: The brown, clay colour of the film – was this the colour of the actual footage, or did you do something to it?

Kubelka: Yes. I wanted a sort of monochrome through the whole thing. Sometimes I break it up. I make this very yellow grass when you see the Negroes walk, where the Negroes walk . . .

Jonas: Yes, that beautiful yellow. You made it that way?

Kubelka: Yes. This is like another world, then. In my films, there are moments when everything stands still. This is a very important thing for me. This is in all of my films. Some films as a whole are like that. These are moments of escape, from the burden of existence, so to say – moments where you are not human, nor something else – not an angle or something, but just *Out*, out of it, and when nothing happens, and nothing leads to this, and this leads to nothing, and there is no tension, and so on. This is the scene in the African film where just the Negroes walk. First, you have the Negroes walk, and you have the Austrians laughing, producing this incredible laughter, and the Negroes don't notice them, they just walk and walk in this yellow grass. And then, overpowered or something by this thing, the laughter ceases, and, then, you hear nothing anymore, just a few birds quacking . . . and the Negroes continue walking, and, then, it's silent, and they walk on and walk, one from the left, one from the right – so this is one of those moments. You remember that?

Jonas: Yes.

Kubelka: It has no reason – you understand. It does nothing for the story; it doesn't say anything; I cannot say what I really mean with that, but these moments are the biggest achievements for me – these are the moments that fascinate me always when I watch the films. In my first film, the moment is a love scene where this rather heavy guy with a cigar says, 'Du wirst mir schon noch verfallen' ('You'll fall for me'), and the girl watches him. And, then, later in the film, you see them again, and the voice says, 'Verfallen.' And then there is another shot, and he says again: 'Verfallen!' The other such moment is where this mannequin turns around, and this fat man comes in, and they watch each other. And, for example, on this, I can't speak at all, but these moments you can only create when you have this huge thing around them. But, for example, films such as *Schwechater* are such moments as a whole. When you watch the *Schwechater,* I mean, it has absolutely no classical tension that goes up and down. Then, it doesn't say anything, it says nothing – because what you see are people drinking beer or something like that – but, really, what is the *Schwechater* film? You don't know. And yet, it fills you very much. Since I work on my films for such a long time, I always make my films sort of . . . how do you say 'Geruest'? the thing that holds the house . . . maybe 'skeleton' – something on which I can hang onto . . . something sustaining and life-keeping. The *Rainer* is very much like that. Oh, it was fantastic in Los Angeles; you should have seen this, really. Because they had very powerful loudspeakers.

Jonas: Was this at the Cinema Theatre?

Kubelka: Yes. They had a screen as large as a house, and they had these powerful loudspeakers. The sound was like Niagara Falls, so loud – incredible, it was fantastic – and the lights, so strong – this was really the event that I wanted it to be. And with this element . . . Here it comes, this fascination of sound and light . . . And to have this element and, then, to be able to create a rhythmic construction with sound and image, which is so precise, on frames of a second – this gives me an incredible feeling. By the way, for *Schwechater,* my model, so to say, was running water, or a tree with thousands of leaves when the wind goes through – I was very concerned with these forms.

Jonas: When I was watching the *Rainer* film, I closed my eyes, at moments, and I could watch it with my eyes closed, as the light rhythms pulsated on and through the eyelids. One could say that the *Rainer* film is the only film ever made that can be seen with your eyes closed.

Kubelka: Yes, Brakhage noticed that, too.

How Many Films You Have to Make to be an Artist?

Jonas: How long is your total work now, how many minutes?

Kubelka: Twelve and a half; and one and a half; and one; and six and a half; and thirteen makes thirty-four and a half minutes.

Jonas: That makes about two minutes a year, no?

Kubelka: For the last fifteen years, I have been totally concentrating on cinema. I began in 1952. Yes, two minutes a year.

Jonas: How many frames? 2,880 frames per year.

Kubelka: This means, less than eight frames a day.
Jonas: That's plenty.
Kubelka: One is enough. When you really speak out, it must be enough. Eggeling spoke out, and he made only five minutes in his whole life. Anyhow, what I now plan is a very big thing.
Jonas: Fifteen minutes? . . . All your films are on 35mm?

On Sixteen Millimetre Films

Kubelka: Yes. But *Afrikareise* is on 16mm. I am convinced now that I can do something in 16mm. I wasn't before. I am so happy about it.
Jonas: You saw the *Afrikareise* projected at the Cinema Theatre, on a large theatre screen, and it was good?
Kubelka: Yes. And the colours were much better than on 35mm. The colours of the negative reversal are so much better than the negative colour, and, in 35mm, you have only negative and positive. I don't think I could have had these colours in 35mm. Therefore, I am starting my next film in 16mm. I feel now that I can do some things of which I always thought but which I couldn't do. After the African film, now, it comforted me very much. I have now the whole gamut I can use.
Jonas: You have really covered some ground, in your four films, from pure light, to live drama. *Unsere Afrikareise* contains, really, the dramatic cinema, novelistic cinema. It could be looked at as a short story – a film short story, because there are characters, people – they come through, each one comes through - it's like one of Joyce's short stories. One could look at it that way. One could look at it also in many other ways.
Kubelka: Whatever I learned from my films is in *Unsere Afrikareise*. I mean, my aim has always been to get articulate with film – because who really is articulate? This is just the beginning. I take time on my films. And really, you don't lose time. They say, if the film isn't finished in two years, it's too late, or something. I mean, when you work your whole life, and, then, you bring out something that speaks – it's time enough. It depends on what you do – this is the whole thing. But, when you really want to see and feel and communicate, and when you can really do it, as long as you work, it's all right; and, when you cannot do it, when you finished it, and it's not really finished – then everything is lost.

I thought that the African film would be finished in three months, when it began. And then, it was five years. Of course, I didn't work every day, and I couldn't work every day because I had no money – many things; and then the founding of the Film Museum came in between. But what's really true is that, these five years, I lived always with these images. I was always concentrated on this film, every day. There wasn't a day when I wasn't – I always lived in this film for five years. I told you already that I learned it all by heart, all the sound – I transcribed it first (I had fourteen hours of sounds recorded in Africa and three hours of film) – I still know this whole . . .

Jonas: Every sound that is in film, you know it by heart – with what image it goes . . .
Kubelka: Oh, yes, of course. But I know much more – I know all what it was before –
Jonas: . . . whatever you omitted, the whole fourteen hours of sound . . . and images . . .
Kubelka: Yes . . . Of course . . . Before I made this film, I learned it for a long time and scribbled every word – so I knew every word – but I also know the *Schwechater* film by heart, and everybody can know it by heart, this is something where . . .
Jonas: Like a poem . . .
Kubelka: Yes, and this is an interesting thing – because to learn by heart something is a very interesting thing. The easiest thing to learn by heart are those languages that you can produce with your body. I mean, you can sing a song, so you learn it by heart, and you can hear it. You can dance by heart. And you can learn a poem by heart. And you can beat the rhythm of the drum by heart. And so on. But when it comes to, say, architecture – this is the interesting thing: You can know architecture by heart; you can know a church or a skyscraper really by heart, and you can know the dimensions – and you have no means of transcribing it. And I don't mean the history – I mean the dimensions, you know the dimensions by heart.
Jonas: If your eye would have the power of recreation, you could almost recreate it. As a matter of fact, Mme. Blavatsky talks about it. Man can create anything he wants, if he knows it with his mind's eye . . . Like they could recreate this beer can . . . Or like the actors, how they train their memory, in the Stanislavsky school – you throw a few objects from your pocket on the table, for a second, then put them back into the pocket and now, describe each of them . . .
Kubelka: So, the same way with my films. For example, *Schwechater,* it's absolutely indescribable, all of them are indescribable, but you can know them by heart. You know exactly what will follow now, you see the forms. I really feel that, with cinema, we are really able to make a step forward. Film is the first of the synthetic arts – this is like the first automobile – it's the first art that is made with machines. Of course, the violin is also a machine, but . . .

I have begun establishing a language, and tradition, and so on, and, of course, I want to transmit all this to others. But what I really want other film-makers to have is the economy, and then the metric rhythms – I would like to see more film-makers working like that. Nobody really uses these rhythmic and akin-to-music qualities that the film has. For example, the *Schwechater* film, I might myself make other films now in this technique. It's a pity. No, it's not a pity. I mean, the films are there. Imitations are no good. I really feel that my films, especially from *Adebar* on, bring one step further on everything that has been done till now – because it has a greater control of the materials. I don't want to say 'editing' any more. I say 'construction'. And here I think my substance is thinning . . . *1 October 1966, New York.*

PETER GIDAL

The Ascetic Task: Peter Gidal's *Room Film* 1973

Deke Dusinberre

Not many of the fifty-two minutes of Gidal's *Room Film 1973* must pass before one becomes aware of a dilemma posed by the film. The film begins with an indistinct light, a light tinged blue-green. The focus sharpens, and out of that indistinct light one recognises rumpled bed-sheets. An unsteady camera hovers briefly, then moves on to examine the base of a lamp and other not quite identifiable objects in varying degrees of close-up in what one assumes to be the room of the title. The camera movement is erratic, might almost be said to be aggravating; one gets a sense of repetition, of constant movement, but of little direction or development. The objects remain hard to identify, and sometimes the screen offers no coherent image at all. The inability to grasp those images is the result of several techniques: the extreme close-up of many shots, the instability of the images (due to the instability of the camera), the poor illumination and the loss of the edges of the frame (both due to manipulation in the printing process), the graininess of the images, the ubiquitous green tinge, and, ultimately, the loss of a sense of gravity (due to the combined effects of extreme close-up and shakiness). The inability to grasp those images also becomes the basis of the aesthetic issues raised by the film.

The film is almost relentless in its denial of tangible images (that is, images which are easily identifiable and spatially locatable). It appears, instead, as periods of green and grey punctuated by instances of light – light not only as the camera studies the ceiling light (at about 8 minutes into the film) and a lamp on the mantel (at 44 minutes), but also light from the projector during the flare-outs at (roughly) 200-foot intervals throughout the film. The camera constantly moves around the room not so much, one feels, by moving through space, as by moving across surfaces. The feeling of surface is evoked throughout: surface of object, of film, of screen. The sense of surface remains primary even in the one section of the film which counters the constant motion of most of the film; a short sequence of the film was printed so that a single image (frame) is held still for several seconds, then jumps to another image which is similarly held. (This short sequence is thus stretched into one of the six 200-foot sections of the film.) The overall impression is one of stasis. Significantly, the images (of a desk and paraphernalia) become only a little

more coherent in this section despite the extended look at each object and in spite of the fact that up to this point the fundamental technique for assuring the insubstantiality of the images had been the erratic motion and erratic focus of the film. But in the static sequence the extreme graininess, the loss of the edge of the frame, and the tinting (orange, rather than blue-green, in this section), all tend to emphasize the surface of the screen. So that even though the images gain a measure of recognizability, they gain no substantiality.

The play of surface and of substance becomes crucial to the film. For it is not merely a film about light and the absence of light (the white-out ending arrives after several extended periods of blackness) but about how insubstantial light can evoke substantiality. Roughly halfway through the film the image of a potted plant is seen, in a close-up concentrating on the leaves. The image is recognizable and, as such, bears some (illusory) substance. But as extreme close-up alternates with one less close, the viewer loses the ability to discriminate between the plant and the shadow it casts on the wall behind it; the shadow has as much visual substance as the image of the object itself. This ploy is amplified when, toward the end of the film, the plant is seen again in close-up, with its shadow again playing an important visual role. This time, the camera zooms out into a rare medium shot to reveal a mirror. The object and the shadow of that object and the reflection of both are situated on the same level of image-substantiality within the film. Thus *Room Film 1973* attempts to exploit the representational proclivities of cinematography while continually denying representation by exposing the illusion on which that representation rests.

As described above, then, the film deals with the issue of cinematic representation on a rather literal level; despite its concern with light as a primary element in that representation, *Room Film 1973* is not comfortably receptive to an analysis which presents it as a neo-platonic consideration of the nature of light. That critical tactic, in fact, would be typical of the American critical practice which has accompanied the North American structural films. Those films are open to analyses which involve an analogic principle, a principle which assumes that the structure of the film serves not only to elaborate the cinematic system of representation, but also serves as an analogue for other systems of meaning. Thus crucial structural films are seen as, say, an analogue for the rejuvenation of vision (*Tom Tom the Piper's Son*) or as an analogue for a gnostic epistemology (*Zorns Lemma*) or as a metaphor for the intentionality of consciousness (*Wavelength*). It would seem, too, that the larger tradition of American avant-garde film-making has exploited such analogic techniques – primarily that of the metaphor, in which the formal concerns of film-making are conflated with another perceptual or epistemological or philosophical problem. But what has made structural films eminently receptive to this tradition is that their dominant shape or structure automatically suggests modes of organisation and meaning other than purely filmic ones.

This analogic strategy has enabled North American structural films to neatly supersede the dilemma posed by *Room Film 1973*. That dilemma

concerns the formalist aspect of modernism ('formalist' is being used here in a casual, non-pejorative context to refer to films which privilege the formal concerns of the medium over any content; historically, the filmic avant-garde has been generally formalist, but it has become a specific concern since the ascendance of the structural film). Formalism strives to render visible those formal postulates which are used 'transparently' by the dominant practice of the medium. Obviously, the formal devices of dominant cinema are not always completely transparent – hence 'stylization' – but a stylized form is ultimately subordinated to the demands of the dominant practice. The formalist project is to challenge the coherent system of formal practices which subtend the dominant practice and thereby challenge the organisation of meaning and, ultimately, the entire system of signification established by the dominant practice. It does this by separating the formal postulates from their conventional context and revealing the way in which they operate, the way in which they determine representation. The putative rationale for this activity is not merely to regenerate a variety of representational forms, but to challenge the very ideology which founds its representation of reality on that system of signification.

The *dilemma* which eventually arises with a rigorous formalist practice is that by making the processes of representation progressively arbitrary (so that those processes become, as it were, underdetermined rather than overdetermined) it runs the risk of lapsing into meaninglessness. For any system of meaning-making demands a differentiation – if not hierarchicisation – of signifiers, so that when formalism assaults that system without suggesting an alternative system, it approaches a state of entropy and becomes – in terms of communication theory – 'meaningless'. When Paul Sharits writes that such a state of 'meaningless syntax' would be welcome,* it would seem to indicate a shared attitude with the axiom that the process of perceiving has supplanted content. Both these propositions are suggestive; but both could easily limit film to an aesthetic tautology: a film is a film. It may or may not be a strip of celluloid with or without images which may or may not be put in a projector which may or may not be turned on, etc., etc. But to yield any insight into those processes of perception which determine cinematic presentation and representation, the formalist film must suggest another order of signification in addition to the one, 'film is'. The dilemma, therefore, is that the formalist film must remain fundamentally reflexive, consistently challenging not only the dominant representational practice, but also its own practice as that very representation is presented, *and* it must represent itself in a way which is continually 'meaningful'.

North American structural films thus engage in the formalist project and simultaneously assure another level of meaning through the analogic approach. But recent English structural film-making is involved in an asceticising strategy which makes the formalist dilemma more urgent. That is,

*Sharits, 'Words Per Page,' *Afterimage*, no. 4 (Autumn 1972)

it denies the analogic tactic and attempts to literalize the levels of meaning available to analysis of the films. The 'ascetic structural' films tend to minimize both content and analogic comparison by effacing – without completely abandoning – the representational image. They are also fundamentally 'shapeless'; the end of the film cannot be predicted, there is no 'goal' achieved, and there is no overall shape which could be metaphorically exploited to engage other issues.

This trend, which has increasingly informed Gidal's mature work (notably *Clouds* [1969], *Bedroom* [1971], *Upside Down Feature* [1967–72], and *Film Print* [1974) reached its own maturation with *Room Film 1973*. It has already been seen how the film continually effaces the representational image. The images become tactile without really becoming sensual. Colour, for instance, is de-emphasized by the uniformity of the tinting (in the later *Film Print*, colour is almost eliminated through the technique of using colour stock to film black and white photographs).

Nor does *Room Film 1973* have a proper beginning or end, or title or credits; *Upside Down Feature* signalled this shapelessness by having the title/credit placed rather arbitrarily in the body of the film rather than at the beginning or end. Duration becomes a crucial issue in Gidal's films; by eliminating any overall shape which could provide reference points, the viewer is thrust back at each moment onto the film. The emphasis on duration has given rise, in other English films, to a valuing of 'real' time – that is, of maintaining a 1:1 relationship between shooting time and projection time in an effort to eliminate any possibility of an 'illusionist' representation of time. What is interesting about *Room Film 1973* is the way it has literalized viewing experience without demanding a 1:1 correspondence. Gidal's specific 'structural' tactic is to cut the film into two-foot lengths (five seconds long, at 16 fps), with splice bars clearly visible as a rhythmic device. Each five-second sequence is repeated once, so that the progression is two steps forward, one back: after the first shot, A, comes A^1 then B, then B^1 then C, C^1 then D . . . (The timelessness of potentially infinite repetition was presaged, again in *Upside Down Feature*, in a sequence which showed the second-hand of a clock sweep over the same six seconds innumerable times.) This progression, however, is visually indistinct, and requires several viewings before it becomes apparent. This is due, again, to the erratic camera movement which masks the precise repetition while suggesting a great repetitiveness as a whole.

Despite the other tactics in the film which contribute to its visual impact – graininess, tinting, under-illumination, loss of edge of frame, etc. – it is the camera-work which remains most central in determining that impact. (Similar camera-work will become even more important in *Film Print* as the other tactics used in *Room Film 1973* become less important.) The camera in *Room Film 1973* not only contributes to the incoherence of the imagery, but also to the incoherence of space. It never constructs a discrete space; that it was shot in one room remains an assumption on the part of the viewer. This is in contrast to the earlier *Bedroom*, in which the wider shots and steadier camera presented a discrete space which was easily identifiable as a single room. *Room*

Film 1973 undermines the establishment of a unity of space just as it undermines (in editing) the unity of time, yet it struggles to maintain the literalness of the recording and viewing experience.

The erratic and often unfocused use of the camera effectively yields a camera uninterested (or, at least, disinterested) in the objects it scans. The camera movement is not mechanical, as is the editing procedure, but appears almost random or arbitrary. So that the film privileges the very process of configuration of the image on the part of the recording apparatus *and* on the part of the viewer; by making the perception of an image on the screen difficult and by rendering those images banal and almost 'meaningless', the film rigorously reduces the semantic element and forces the spectator back onto her/his own capacities for meaning-making.

But this very shift in the responsibility for meaning-making allows an alternate analysis of the role of the omnipresent camera in the film. This would suggest that the hand-held quality of the camera elicits an anthropomorphized analysis, that the camera operates as subjective eye rather than objective lens. Thus the camera could be said to perform the function of 'looking' in fascination rather than of 'seeing' in disinterest. This question devolves on the spectator granting either an intentionality or an arbitrariness to the camera movement, but a more important issue centres on whether or not the objects viewed are intensified, ironically, through the very denial of any complacent recognition of them. The objects are not as neutral as might first appear; Gidal has concentrated much of his image-making on spaces and objects of personal interest to him. The preciousness of those objects may be understated but it is never completely absent; in *Room Film 1973* the objects are mainly indistinct – as opposed to *Bedroom* where they are quite distinct – but a few recognizable personal possessions emerge (such as the rather esoteric *Beautiful Book* by Jack Smith). Simon Field has pointed out to me that Gidal's seemingly banal images would thus function pointedly and specifically; would, in fact, situate the film in connection with the acknowledged influence (on Gidal) of the work of Beckett, in which banalized action ironically intensifies the personal drama. An elaboration of this type of analysis of *Room Film 1973* would probably posit a specific subject (Gidal) performing a phenomenological reduction on the objects in the real world.

As already noted, I remain unconvinced that *Room Film 1973* can sustain an analysis like that, an analysis, ultimately, of the analogic order. The camera movement, it has been argued, indicates an arbitrariness rather than intentionality. What is interesting is that the question remains unresolved. *Room Film 1973* has reformulated the initial dilemma into another order of dilemma: when does the continual effacement of content – to reach the literal level demanded of a confrontation with the formalist dilemma – force an analysis in which the observation of that absence of content constitutes a presence by virtue of the history of representation which prefigures it? It must be concluded that the dilemma, of course, remains unresolvable; *Room Film 1973*, striving toward a new level of didacticism, has performed the service of bringing that into focus.

September 1975

BIRGIT and WILHELM HEIN

On *Structural Studies*

Birgit Hein

If an artist needs to write explanations about his work, there is something wrong with the work. This opinion is widely spread and it is possibly true to a certain extent in the area of the fine arts, where a long tradition of professional criticism exists. In the area of the experimental – or avant-garde – film the situation is different, as there exists no comparable tradition. Here the artists themselves have to work out categories to judge their work. Therefore it is necessary to write about the films to help in their understanding.

Since the beginning, our work in film was concentrated on the medium. *Rohfilm* was the first film where this concern was obviously expressed, although in a way of emotional explosion against the film-system and its narrow limits of expression. It was also an effort to overcome the influence of the aesthetic of the New American Cinema, of Brakhage, whose work was the main influence in the beginning.

Most important for further development were the Fluxus-Films as a collection of very short films, each concentrated only on one subject and each a statement about film. The simplicity of the films, the renunciation of any creative transformation of the material, was an essential step towards a new aesthetic. Of course credit also goes to Warhol. But at that time his films existed only in literature; there was no possibility of seeing them.

The first step to a more controlled work in this sense was *Work in Progress Teil A*, 1969, which was composed of six single films of 3 to 10 minutes length. Each film was made separately, dealing with one special problem: 1. Commercial film, 2. Printing process, 3. Illusion of perception, 4. Reality, 5. Time, 6. Illusion of movement. The films were put together not as a continuous statement, but as reactions to each other. Then the 'Portraits' were started (1970), also not as a planned series; it grew parallel to the other work. It is still continued as a statement about film technique as a basis for film aesthetic. Another approach to this problem was *Work in Progress Teil C*, 1971, which is constructed only with pieces of found films: Hollywood, Documentary contemporary and historical, home movies, TV news. It shows the different appearance of film, also as a counterpart to our own work.

The first series of two-screen films, 1971, is concentrated on the interaction

between two parallel images, on movement by change of light inside the images and from one image to the other. A new series of two-screen films, which is in production, deals with the angles. Here the two images explain each other by their difference.

To a certain extent *Structural Studies* is a condensation of the work done so far. It includes the experience of the earlier work, and demonstrates this by combining old and new films in a new statement about structure: which is not seen as an individual constructing system of a film, but in the technical and perceptional laws that are basic for the functioning of film. These are singled out and visualized. The theme of the film is the analysis of the phenomena of the perception of movement. The short single films each deal with one problem.

What is new in the film is the confrontation of abstract demonstration material and real image material each shot in the same technique. Here the possibilities and the limits of technique are shown, and the importance of the image material becomes obvious. To get control over the expression of the image is of major interest in all the work to come.

Like all the earlier films mentioned here *Structural Studies* is an open construction. It can be continued or changed without any danger of losing its essence.

Succession of films in *Structural Studies*

Description		*Explanation*
		I. Illusion of natural movement and deceptive movement.
1. Black square on white ground 50″	b&w	After-image: in the blank-film appears the after-image of the black square.
2. Blank-film 23″	b&w	In the following black leader appears the after-image of the blank film.
3. Black-film 42″	b&w	
4. Two fixed points with different position in the image are presented one after the other in short distances. a. 10 frames each interrupted by 3 black frames b. 5 frames each interrupted by 3 white frames c. 5 frames each d. 1 frame each e. one black point, one white point 10 frames each, interrupted by 3 black frames f. one white point on black, one black point on white ground 5 frames each g. like f but 10 frames each 60″	b&w	Phi-phenomenon: 'The second characteristic underlying the perception of apparent movement is the so-called phi-phenomenon. This was studied experimentally and reported by Wertheimer 1912 . . . Wertheimer studied the effects of presenting fixed short lines of light, separated in space, the second being presented some time after the first. If the interval between the two exposures is short ($\frac{1}{32}$ sec.) the two stimuli will appear as two and as simultaneous; and if the interval is relatively long ($\frac{1}{5}$) the lines are again seen as two but successive. At some interval whose duration is between those two

intervals, an appearance of movement is seen, the optimal value being around $\frac{1}{6}$ sec.' (The Focal Encyclopedia of Film and Television Techniques, London and New York 1969, p. 968.)
It is the basis for filmic animation and therefore treated here so comprehensively.

5. White pieces of paper are laid subsequently on a grey paper and shot with single-frame
2.5″ b&w
The same with black pieces on white paper
2″ b&w

Variation of 4:
Illusion of movement.

6. Abstract forms are painted on blank-film differing frame by frame
7″ b&w

same as 5.

6a. A piece of film-leader with numbers and handwritten notes
8″ colour

same as 5.

7. Animated drawing: a man walks to a house
1.5″ b&w

same as 5.

8. Two pieces of a documentary of a trotting race, showing two different trotters with one after the other
18″ b&w

Persistence of vision demonstrated in the wheels.

9. Ventilator at different speed
19″ b&w

same as 8.

black leader 15″

10. Flicker = One and a half min. of part III from *Work in Progress Teil A*, 1969. One image is shown, interrupted by 3 black frames in the continuous sequence of 3 frames image, 3 frames black
80″ b&w

Illusion of movement only by intermittent light.

11. 'Kurt Schwitters I' from *Portraits*, 1972: two different portrait photos of Kurt Schwitters are presented one after the other:
a. 1 frame each
b. 2 frames each
c. 3 frames each
d. 1 frame each interrupted by 1 black frame
e. 2 frames each interrupted by 2 black frames
f. 3 frames each interrupted by 3 black frames
73″ b&w

Demonstration of 4 with chosen real image material: in a sequence of 3 images, 3 black frames, a continuous movement of the heads is achieved.

12. 'Kurt Schwitters II' from *Portraits*, 1972: The two photos and the black frames are presented in a variation from 1 to 4 frames per

same as 11.
Here two different kinds of artificial movement are seen at the same time.

image. At the same time the fingers of the one shooting the film and arranging the fotos on the table are seen over the images, changing their position at different intervals from those of the images 161″ b&w	
13. A Japanese postcard of a girl who twinkles with her eye, if the postcard is turned at a certain angle 31″ b&w	The effect is based on the phenomenon of 4.
14. 'Walk-Film' = about 2 minutes of part VI of *Work in Progress Teil A*, 1969. Each frame of a short film-strip (33 frames long), showing a walking man, is reproduced as still photo. These still photos are shot in single-frame as reanimation and variation of the original movement. Even if the single images are interrupted by 10 black or white frames (1 frame per image, 10 frames per black/white shot), the movement is seen as continuous 145″ b&w	Illusion of natural movement.
15. Several short pieces of a colour documentary of a riding competition 16″ colour	The perfect illusion of reality as contrast and supplement to the statements made by the films from 1–14.
Black leader 15″	II. Filmic movement by shooting and projecting.
16. Two arrows pointing at each other (the left is filmed first, then the film rewound, then the right one is shot) 25″ b&w	Frame stability test of the camera.
17. Blank-film. The frame line is moved in 6″ b&w	Frame stability in the projector.
18. Professional leader. A white line on black is seen. Its movement only becomes apparent by the numbers which appear at a certain distance instead of the line 20″ b&w	Movement of the film-strip through the projector.
19. A refilmed still photo 95″ b&w	Frame-stability of the projector.
Black leader 15″	III. Filmic movement by camera-operations (focus variation, light variation, distance variation).
20. Black square on white. The focus is gradually moved to and fro in its total range 77″ b&w	The square seems to move from back to front.

21. Like 20, but shot with single frame at different focus positions
77″ b&w

Very strong movement because of the quick changing of the size of the square.

22. The same as 21, but with real images (photos of landscapes)
110″

The kind of movement, created by the change of focus, which is demonstrated in 20 and 21, remains basically the same for the following films: 22 to 25.

23. The same as 20, but with real images (also the same photos as 22)
44″ b&w

But the expression of the films differs according to even the slightest difference in the technique used: e.g., the number of frames taken at each shot, or whether the focus range changes or is steady.

24. The same as 21, but a real life view in colour. Artificial movement and real movement combine
100″ colour

But the most important difference between the films is caused by the chosen image material. This makes it obvious that a pure structural film – a film on structure – can only be the test film.

25. About one minute of *Scharf/Unscharf*, 1972, which consists of loop prints of slightly different landscape views, shot in single frame: 1 frame in focus, one frame out of focus. In contrast to 24, the out of focus position remains always the same.
The result is an image, moving in itself
67″ b&w

Black leader 15″

26. Black square on white, shot with a zoom moved through the total range from wide angle to tele. The zooming speed differs from very slow to very fast
39″ b&w

The movement is much stronger than in the change of focus. It creates even the illusion of deep space in the image from back to front.
The two films, 26 and 27, together are another example of what has been said above.

27. A static real life view (park avenue with trees on both sides) is taken in the same technique
45″ b&w

Black leader 15″

28. One minute of *Doppelprojektion I*, 1972, showing a view through a window from inside a room, which is lighted by lamps.
a. left side of the two-screen film, fading-in automatically with changing aperture
30″ b&w
b. right side of the two-screen film, fading out automatically with changing aperture
30″ b&w

Movement by change of light. Also the light movement in these films creates a space illusion: the image itself seems to move from back to front and back because the outside has different light from the inside. By fading in or out, different areas of the picture come out in the right exposure while other parts are over- or under-exposed.
The changing aperture brings about a change of depth of space: the space is extremely narrow, if the aperture is nearly closed.

29. One minute of *Doppelprojektion II*, 1972, which shows a static view of a wide meadow, shot with open aperture (2.5).
a. left side of the two-screen film, fading-in automatically
30″ b&w
b. right side of the two-screen film fading-out automatically
30″ b&w

Here the image remains flat. As the aperture remains open, the image builds only for a very short time. The movement remains on the surface, coming from the sides to the centre of the image.

30. One minute of *Doppelprojektion III*, 1972, showing automatic fades of pure light.
a. left side of the two-screen film fading-in
30″ b&w
b. right side of the two-screen film fading out
30″ b&w

Movement without any direction. 28–30 is another example of what is said under 22–25.

Black leader 15″

31. Multi-exposure: two levels with different colour photos faded in and out at different speeds, and two levels faded in and out with pure light in different speed
114″ colour

Another example of movement by light variation.

32. *Work in Progress Teil B*, 1970. A sequence of picture postcards each in colour and black and white. Each b&w postcard is superimposed on the respective postcard in colour
170″ colour

The same as 31. The change of colour brings about a movement inside the image.

33. Test-reel for *Stills*, 1973
80″ colour

Demonstrates that *Stills* is also developed from the same basic questions about the medium, although it looks different at first glance.

Of course, the above is not everything that can be said about the films. Much is omitted, for example any discussion of the length of the films, or of their difference in their appearance in the original and the new context, which is particularly important for the two-screen films. The description does not take the place of the film; it is only an initial aid for getting into the film.

Cologne 1975

GILL EATHERLEY

Notes on Film

Gill Eatherley

. . . Things started with a definite movement away from painting to some mini-trials with a stills camera and its time exposure device. Produced static recordings of light bulb traces in a black space: with two results – one, unsatisfactory; two, began working with film. The attitudes behind the early popcorn movies can explain themselves – a travelling difference, trajectory, and film concern, up to the making of *Meanwhile*, my film and light film, as part of 'Light Occupations'. My first dealings on film involved preoccupations with processes of editing, recorded rhythms and energies, and subsequent relationships between elements, plus some colour printing – *Hand Grenade*. Then, in *Deck*, the basic format alights from re-filming, breaking down the screen size, pulse, shape and transformation. *Pan Film* and *Shot Spread* are derived more directly from straight camera/eye observations, topology of film and its limitations – *Shot Spread* has a strict cutting score between the three screens, shifting the 'image' from left to right. *Now*, basic concerns with film syntax have been interrelated with the audience/film presentation/situation. For although the word 'expanded' cinema has also been used for the open/gallery size/multi screen presentation of film, this 'expansion' (could still but) has not *yet* proved satisfactory – for my own work anyway. Whether you are dealing with a single postcard size screen or six ten-foot screens, the problems are basically the same – to try to establish a more positively dialectical relationship with the audience. I am concerned (like many others) with this balance between the audience and the film – and the noetic problems involved. There have been many struggles with projection ideas, which are impossible to realize, due to lack of situations outside the conventional cinema in London . . . I would like to be able to do a little more than just cinematically squatting – while the films disappear, to be shown in someone's film club at the other end of the country – and any reaction from an audience, and the film's physical reality is projected miles away from me. The film-makers' own direct awareness of the presentation of the work and the audience are equally as important to the film as its own emulsion. Like we sometimes feel 'the axeman has a foot in the door to our heads', the viewer might think, 'The film-maker has a film in the gate to his head.'

1973 London Avant-Garde Film Festival catalogue

Notes on Films

George Landow

What's Wrong With This Picture?

What's Wrong With This Picture? at present consists of: Part 1: An exercise in combining a documented segment of a real occurrence with structural elements. The film becomes a study of speech patterns. There is, on several levels, a play on the difference between film mechanics and video electronics. Part 2: An exercise in 1) making a facsimile of a 1930's Coronet instructional film entitled *Are You A Good Citizen?* and 2) combining it with structural elements. It was made as close to the original as possible, using the original soundtrack dialogue which was re-synched and slightly edited. Stills from the original film were used to determine the composition of each shot. The printing techniques used produce the illusion of reverse figure-ground relationships – i.e. the background appears to be closer than the figures.

Remedial Reading Comprehension

Remedial Reading Comprehension: The important thing to see is that the film contains visual metaphors. The first image is a female head, horizontal and more or less suggestive of three-dimensional space. The next to last image is the same head which becomes a white silhouette in a shallow white (not black) space. Compare the two grains of rice – whole grain (brown) and processed (white). The white rice grain has lost its 'essence' (the germ), just as the silhouette has lost its three-dimensionality. One thing this suggests is the process of removing substance, which is done to food, art, environment, religion, etc. An art that becomes personal removes some of the substance to get a 'purer' product. The film-maker himself appears in the film, yet he tells us it is about us and 'not about its maker'. Certain images – the rice, 'Madge's' friend – are impersonal. They might be images from TV commercials or industrial promotional films. There is a relationship between the personal and non-personal images which is roughly the same as the relationship between the first image and the next to last image. Before the female becomes a silhouette there is a transition period in which a struggle seems to take place between the three-dimensional form and the flat one. The rhythm of the sound

track is the rhythm of this alteration. When the struggle is over, the three-dimensional form disappears and a new rhythm is heard – the rhythm of the abstract symbols – words – which have been moving across the field of struggle.

Remedial Reading Comprehension

Fred Camper

Landow's films are structural rather than sensual, which is to say that their meanings are contained not within the isolated qualities of the images but rather in the way those images combine and interrelate within the entire edited form. One of the ways that *Remedial Reading Comprehension* works is in the degree of filmic distance which each image has in the film. Distance here refers to the degree of awareness on the part of the viewer that the image he is watching is a film image, rather than 'reality'. Landow's film does not try to build up an illusion of reality, to combine the images together with the kind of spatial or rhythmic continuity that would suggest that one is watching 'real' people or objects. It works rather toward the opposite end, to make one aware of the unreality, the created and mechanical nature, of film.

The degree of distance of the images is determined partly by their positions in the film and the way they are introduced, and partly by the quality of the images themselves. The opening 'establishing' shot of the girl lying is introduced abruptly, she is framed closely and squarely; these things give her a physical or real presence greater than most of the rest of the film. In the dark background of this frame appears, in the distance, a square shaped (although tilted obliquely with respect to the camera) frame, inside which is contained an image of students sitting aimlessly in a classroom. This image moves forward through space toward the camera, until it fills the whole frame to the exclusion of the girl. A specific relationship is thus established: to an extent, one sees the girl as a real or primary image, and the students as a filmic occurrence, perhaps even as her thought or dream. (Although if one were to take it as her dream one should be aware of the filmic way in which Landow insists on representing dreams – denying them any of the physical, 'dream' reality they actually have, showing them only in terms of film form.) The students are distanced from us by our initial perception of them as being actually enclosed within a film frame. But as Landow holds this image, now filling the screen, it begins to take on a reality of its own, despite our memory. Someone shouts 'lights' and the lights are dimmed. The people had apparently asssembled to watch a film. The next shot shows a man running towards the camera; the words 'This is a film about you' are printed on the frame. One might think that theoretically this is a doubly-endistanced image: since it is contained within a filmic image, and yet is itself a film which the students so contained are

watching. But the shot itself has a strong physical immediacy, because of the rich blue colour and the length for which it is held and due to its closely-framed representation of continuous running. This immediacy places it on a primary level similar to the image of the girl. We then cut to the section in which a woman talks about rice, after which the image of the man running (Landow himself) returns. The obvious ridiculousness and irrelevancy of what the woman says, and her enclosure by the two running images, give her a degree of distance.

Yet its sudden introduction, which thrusts it directly at the viewer, and the close, even 'physical' framing, works here as in earlier shots to give the section with the woman a degree of primary reality or lack of distance. This ambiguity, of distance in one respect but not in another, is the sort of playing with the illusion/reality of film that is so crucial to Landow.

It is also, paradoxically, a learning scene, in that the woman is trying to 'teach' us something about rice, and Landow does show her demonstration. And, if one is to persist with the interpretation that the images following the word 'lights' are the film the students are seeing, this would appear to be its main content. Which only points up its ridiculousness; and the fact that by establishing its own context it causes us to forget the students.

The next image after the man running is the woman sleeping again. This film's circular form has now made itself apparent. It proceeds from image to image with a process which makes each image seem more distanced or unreal than the last: from film image to film that the people in the film image are watching to rice commercial within this 'film about you'. But it is a form which is constantly self-renewing: this is what makes it circular rather than a series of linear enclosures. The enclosed images each become primary in themselves.

Now superimposed over the woman's head appear pages of text, with single phrases made visible (the rest are out-of-focus) in rapid succession, a kind of enforced speed reading. This was preceded by rapid flashes of the woman's face, on and off, with a static rhythm anticipating that of the reading. In a way, this is another learning scene, like the woman with the rice. The important thing is that while both scenes deal with the question of knowledge, they deal with it and describe it only in formal filmic terms.

The final image is of the man running again, now with words 'not about its maker' superimposed, completing the sentence begun earlier. There is a kind of enmeshing of two separate film subjects here. One might imagine that all the images following the word 'lights' are in the film the students see on the screen; in this case we conclude that while the girl lying thinks about the students, and perhaps the film they see, yet she apparently also appears within this film. Or, if one takes the film the students see to end with the second shot of the man running, then the third shot of the man running – 'not about its maker' – appears in the context of the primary film. The film's form offers no clear answer to this duality. Consequently, one cannot say that *Remedial Reading Comprehension* is strictly an enumerating or organizing of different forms of filmic distance, since the degree and type of distance of each image is ambiguous. Rather, the film is about that ambiguity. By distancing the

images, Landow denies them primary reality; by making that distance ambiguous, he prevents the distance itself from having any primary reality either. That is to say, if it was clear that the bulk of *Remedial Reading Comprehension* was a 'film within a film', then, although aware of this distance, we might be encouraged to settle back and enjoy the 'reality' of this film, since its nature and degree of distance were clearly fixed. Films-within-films in conventional narrative films have a clearly defined and fixed degree of distance which, since it is visible at the outset, moves to the back of consciousness and allows the viewer to feel the film-within-the-film events almost as a primary reality. Landow, by having each frame represent not one but the possibility of several degrees and types of distance, keeps us constantly questioning the nature of each image.

'This is a film about you not about its maker.' Landow seeks not to describe his own psychological being or reality, but rather to describe the structural interrelationships between different forms of filmic perception and knowledge. This is a subject which does not appear to be directly connected with 'individuality'. The various forms of distance are established in entirely structural ways. And thus in a certain way the film's effect can be said to depend more on the audience's reaction to these forms of endistancing than on the personal vagaries of Landow himself. Of course the entire form of the film reflects on Landow; but the way the film *operates* is to make us aware of, to force us to relate to, its abstract structure. Landow does not admit any psychological or associative-symbolic meanings to his images; they can be perceived only in terms of structure. Thus we cannot attribute any associative reactions we may have to anything except the structure to Landow, we must attribute them to ourselves. And yet the film seems designed to encourage purely formal reactions to it. The section about the rice cannot conceivably involve us 'emotionally', nor can the speed-reading section; we never identify with or become the action on the screen. It is rather our distance from it, and the way that we perceive the form of that action, that is important. Our reactions proceed not from psychological empathy but from awareness of form. Thus in a sense we are more aware of our own reactions than we are of the film itself. And so Landow's forms reveal as much to us about our reactions to those forms as they do about Landow himself.

Film Culture, Spring 1971

WILLIAM RABAN

Raban: *View*

Peter Gidal

William Raban's film is five minutes long. The view is of water (stream), an embankment, some trees. The view is into the clear, deep distance. Wind moves the vegetation. The tide finds various heights.

The film was made partially as time-lapse sequences (one frame shot every so-and-so many seconds, rather than the usual 24 frames per second). The film cuts back and forth (side to side?) from one time-reality to the other, from 'normal' 24 fps time (or is it slow motion?) to the single-frame time lapse sequences (time *compression*). The *shape* of one sense of time is poised against the shape of another sense of time. A model sense of time is not set up. The viewer never receives one vision of objective reality; it is cinema. Movement of one shape (i.e. water) in time relates in a dialectic against movement of another shape (i.e. trees) in time. Or sky-tone versus tide-height. There is no simplistic 'day to night' narrative. We are dealing with 'pure', not social, times.

Structural relationships are organised by the film-maker in the contextual relativities and in his in-camera editing choices. The viewer is forced to make (existential) decisions (consciously or not) in relating to the pace of one shape's speed as normal, the other as relative variant.

The film is also a 'documentary' of the *way* the camera copes with time (and this mechanistic *process* is more important than the specific image content: for me, possibly not for Raban). The frame's rigidity (static viewpoint) disillusionizes further the vision, exposes it as *selective space*. And the two given sets of time disillusionize and expose each other as *selective time* entities. They are arbitrary in their specifically chosen speeds; they are the opposite of arbitrary (i.e. they are pre-structured) in their connection(s) to one another, and to the viewer's demystified (attempted) awareness of the film-making process, complex though it may be. Vicarious hypnosis is not encouraged. The film demands a dialectic aesthetic *act* on our part; it's a beautiful film on Raban's part.

Notes on Film, London College of Printing, December 1971

Raban's *River Yar*

John Du Cane

William Raban's twin screen *River Yar*, made with Chris Welsby, is one of the richest and most beautiful films to have been made by an English film-maker. It is a dramatic experience, the key elements of which are *time* – the way we perceive it normally in relation to the way the camera records it and the way it can be re-presented on the screen; and *space* – the way in which we perceive it normally in relation to how the camera modifies that perception, preselecting the space and bringing out transitions and transformations in that space that would normally be imperceptible. The code for our reading of these time-space relations is one of seasonal changes: three weeks of Autumn and three weeks of Spring are presented adjacently, photographed at one frame every minute, day and night. The Spring screen begins with a normal speed fourteen minute sunrise sequence, while the Autumn leaps on at a day a minute. There is then a seven minute section when Autumn and Spring are both in time-lapse before the Autumn switches into a fourteen minute period of real time for a sunset into darkness. The image is always the same wide-angle shot of a tidal estuary landscape.

Raban talked about what he was doing in the film: 'I wanted to disorient people's time senses, but by a very direct experience rather than by them thinking about how the film is made. I'm not trying to change attitudes, but I'm curious to find out how certain things will turn out on film. For instance, the vision on the screen is only confined to camera reality, because the human eye makes adjustments all the time for exposure and you're never really aware of this loss of light into sunset, it's so gradual, you can't catch it. I was using the same speed as normal time, but because of the nature of the camera, I lost the image. And again, with the fade in at sunrise, which is a record of emulsion slowly gaining light, it's even more interesting because, although there must be a precise point at which the image appears on the screen, that precise point will in fact vary immensely, depending on each person's relative attention; the relation between the real and the illusory, between objective and subjective reality gets fairly complex.

'I'm also interested in the whole business of selecting a specific image quality. When we arrived at this mill, it was getting dark and we were due to start filming at sunrise the next morning. We bolted the camera down to this window sill without seeing the landscape; we decided to point the camera

south because we wanted all the shadows to be apparent and there was a decision to include some sky in the frame, but otherwise we made no aesthetic, romantic decisions in terms of composition and so on. I'd hate people to see my films as romantic in that way; I'm dealing with specific quantities – the films aren't just pretty colours, or optical effects, but precise investigations.'

Time Out, 14 July 1972

Notes on Films

William Raban

I started making films in 1970. At the same time, my work in painting was moving towards making physical documentation of specific changes occurring within landscape situations. The images which I was dealing with were the self-formed paint marks on canvas, being the product of a direct organic time process.

I made a number of day-to-night time-lapse views of nature before making *River Yar* with Chris Welsby. This is a two screen colour concentration on nature taking its course, in time, over six weeks, one screen Spring one Autumn, utilizing different (and clearly exposed) time elements (film speeds).

Colours of this Time. The camera frames the intersection of two footpaths in Kensington Gardens. One frame is exposed every twenty seconds. The film is a study of relative speeds set to the scale of walking pace.

Against an opaque and slow changing parkscape, people pass towards/away and crossways on the screen. All fast movements are reduced to a transparent blur. (The camera shutter was held open for the duration between exposures.)

The time exposures exaggerate the changes in colour of natural light. So that as a progression from sunrise to sunset the film marks imperceptible changes of light by strong shifts of colour bias in the film emulsion itself. Unlike previous time-lapse studies, this is a near perfect camera time recording. Film is exposed for the whole of the 'real time' period. The scale of screen speed is controlled by the intermittency of frames. Within this framework which reduces the whole daylight period to minutes the film studies a more specific minor scale of speed changes occurring inside the twenty-second frame interval. Each frame reduces movement to multiple images. Movement is equated with transparency.

Broadwalk – A telephoto view looking northwards up the Broadwalk in Regent's Park, distancing the camera from film subject. The film opens and closes with a 30 second recording at 'real time' (24 fps). The in-between 24 hour period (9.00 a.m. – 9.00 a.m.) is condensed by single framing.

Again, the shutter is held open all the time between exposures. People are recorded in speeded-up time but their images are held on the film by the condensed perspective field of telephoto vision. This impression of expanded distance, which opposes the experience of compressed time, only becomes

apparent when the film switches to 'real time'.

Both these films have been 'stretched' so that the total original footage which occupied five minutes of 'screen time' was refilmed at high speed to produce a projection copy which is twenty-five minutes long. The film which the audience sees is balanced between the experience of compressed time (as in the time-lapse original) and protracted time (occurring in the refilming stage) slow enough to show the build up of multiple images or individual frames.

A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain,
Vol. 3, Gallery House, 1972

Time Stepping (1974)

The time element of film, and its relationship to the acual time of filming, has been a central concern in my work. More recently, I have been finding ways to incorporate the space that is filmed too; space perception and time perception being shown to be absolutely interrelated in film. Time stepping is an exploration of this aspect of film and takes the form of a rhythmic space-time game which is played by two cameras. They shoot alternately, and pan in opposite directions down a street, from the same central point, two doorways at the front of a row of derelict houses. The film from both cameras is edited together in the sequence and duration of its shooting, any gaps between the takes being represented by black spacing, and any overlap resulting in superimposition.

A second section of the film maintains the parallel of projection duration to shooting duration whilst exploring single-frame samples on both cameras. On one camera, single frames are taken and projected in the normal one-twenty-fourth of a second, and on the other, time exposures lasting several moments are stretched to occupy the screen for their exposure duration.

Catalogue notes, 5th Knokke Experimental Film Festival

ROGER HAMMOND

Notes on Hammond

Peter Gidal

In the small masterpiece *Window Box* (b&w, 3 mins.), Hammond sets up a situation which is mystifying in its presentation and at the same time demands of (and allows) the viewer to demystify the given (visual) impulses. The situation presented thus includes within its own premises the objective factors which determine the possibility (and probability) of successful analytical clarification. The criteria one uses to evaluate, interpret, are secondary to this conceptually determined *process* of working out what *is*. In this film we are presented with an image consisting of a medium-shot of a room and a large window; in the distance another window belonging to the building opposite – the light is on. The image is filmed, slow zoom out and in and back out, very very slowly giving a wider range of image while at the same time specifying the exact dimensions in space of the 'subject'. The film is shot on negative stock, projected and reshot on negative stock so that the result, after the significant material-transformations, is a positive image (which has all the whites and blacks washed out due to the neg-stock). The film was shot at night. Light areas immediately signify daytime and it is only through dealing with the information given in a precise manner that we come to realize the exact positioning of this specific segment of reality in correct time and space. The processes can be clarified, i.e. negative anti-theses can be exposed as such, colour on film (in this case within a black-and-white tonal range) becomes the basis of an only apparently inversable universe, interchangeable in terms of abstraction but not in terms of physical material actuality. The responsibility is with the viewer to determine what *is* and the film makes this apparent. We are taken into a post-logical empiricism which realizes the *sensual* strength of illusion while at the same time using precisely *that* to refer to precision of information. The opposite of Cartesian in its in-built negation of any aspect outside of the given system. Hammond is non-atomistic, non-referential, within a specific, set-up and defined *closed* system. Thus a pure, consequent attitude.

There is also at the basis of Hammond's concern a notion of symmetrical relation of positive to negative, as with his notion in *Erlanger Programme* of opposing (and equal) forces of speed. Directionality of speed becomes speed-

in-time, becomes the given (premise), and the opposing directions cancel each other out so that there is no climactic orientation, and no resolution. Each moment is thus not relevant as statement but as cancellation of previous notation (*concurrent* with clarification). This is the experience of nothingness (not meaninglessness): a philosophical 'rather than' a psychological position, a conceptual rather than a contentual obligation to film.

In an earlier film his orientation was already towards speed-as-time, image-arrestation, mental activation with and against the given (which is take and retake circular, left right right left in no particular order, within a room). Hammond here though used a 'beautiful' environment and dealt with this 'reality' in a manner incorporating the heavy consequentiality of Mike Snow and the coloristic glow of the Siennese Iconists. This work was not as attenuated as his later two discussed important films. Hammond is purifying the conceptual and non-psychological aspect of his work to the point where it increasingly represents his calculable mental system: the non-referential structural obligation. But he does not create a whole system (a system of wholeness); rather, he deciphers one.

Programme notes, National Film Theatre, London, 1972

FRED DRUMMOND

Notes on Drummond

Fred Drummond has made a series of short single and double screen films that explore visual rhythms and the potentials of the printing process. They are non-narrative, careful orchestrations of repeated loop footage. *Shower Proof*, an early film, is built out of a sequence of a man and woman in a bathroom, he brushing his teeth, she tying up her hair, stepping into the shower, stepping out drying herself, then the man again brushing his teeth, and so on in various sequences. The film is printed on increasingly high contrast negative. The image grows from the abstract, yet plainly anthropomorphic, steadily through to the personal yet non-specific – we see neither the man's nor the woman's face in detail – and back. The film explores the relation between form and movement. *Shower Plus Loop* uses the same footage, plays a loop of film, but presents it at once more personally and less abstractly – the man and woman are individuals, it occurs to us to wonder who they are, about their relationship to each other and to the camera, yet the movements are the same as in the previous film. The visual rhythm in both films is so strong that in spite of the films being silent the viewer has a strong aural impression.

Maja Replicate (1971, 15 mins., 2 screen colour) uses fades, freeze frames, slipping of film and loop reprinting; Drummond describes its 'ingredients' as 'a sickly female, found bleach loop of bogus chemical overseers, Marianne in the woods Phun City'. *Green Cut Gate* (15 mins. colour) uses black-and-white material printed onto colour stock through green filters simultaneously with a superimposed flicker loop which gives the film a continuous pulse.

Verina Glaessner, *Cinema Rising*, 1972

Green Cut Gate

This film (1971, 10 mins., colour) is a continuation of the colour printing process begun with *Maja Replicate* but using less reactive material. All material was originally black and white and is printed onto colour stock through green filters simultaneously with a flicker loop superimposed as a continuous pulse. Originally conceived as a double screen movie; I now prefer it to be projected single screen as a lengthy green meditation. Basically the result of a present time printing process (the manipulation of the images took place while the film was being printed although editing has not been totally eliminated), which investigates some perceptual illusion, e.g., after-images. A good film to experience with eyes closed.

Fred Drummond, 1971

MIKE LEGGETT

Notes on *Shepherd's Bush*

Shepherd's Bush, the first of the new films, was a revelation. It was both true film motion and demonstrated an ingenious association with the film-process. It is the procedure and conclusion of a piece of film logic using a brilliantly simple device: the manipulation of the light source in the Film Co-op printer such that a series of transformations are effected on a loop of film material. From the start Mike Leggett adopts a relational perspective according to which it is neither the elements nor the emergent whole but the relations between the elemental (transformations) that become primary through the use of logical procedure.

Roger Hammond, LMFC Catalogue

Leggett's *Shepherd's Bush* is the purest structural film made in England to date. The screen starts as a mid-grey field – there's a soundtrack of a rhythmic falling cadence (a note slowing down, a heartbeat-like noise); slowly, minute variations of tone occur and strengthen to rippling fingers of light. The contrast increases and the looped image becomes clear – the camera is gliding over a mottled surface, through a jungle of hard-edged bars of light and shade. Then the white begins to dominate, until the whole screen becomes blank again.

David Curtis, *Cinema Rising,* 1972

TONY CONRAD

On *The Flicker*

Malcolm LeGrice

. . . Cinema, as a mechanism, is designed to project one separate picture every $\frac{1}{24}$ second. If the period during which the projection shutter is closed is taken into account, each image occupies the screen for approximately half that time, about $\frac{1}{50}$ second, while the rate of image change in film is deliberately located just beyond the point where the eye can discern flicker. This factor is economic using the smallest number of separate images necessary to create smooth movement. However, film's 'location' on this optical threshold makes it ideally suitable for examining the threshold itself by exposure to optical events and rates of change which move progressively into the region where flicker is discerned, by increasing the ratio of dark to light frames in increments of $\frac{1}{24}$ second.

The first film to show this perceptual possibility in an extreme form is Kubelka's *Arnulf Rainer*. However much its retinal bombardment of alternating short black-and-white sequences may initiate optical effects, like that of colour after-image, the film is constructed in such a way that no stroboscopic rates are maintained in a sufficiently unbroken sequence to allow it to be described as concerned with the optical factors. The first such film is Tony Conrad's *The Flicker,* made six years later, in 1966, and conceived entirely in terms of retinal response. It explores different stroboscopic systems first, and then systematic interactions between them. The result is a film which enables awareness of changing modes of response to recognizably different strobe conditions – awareness of how the autonomic response begins to shade off into pattern recognition as the black-and-white units increase in length; how the different systems interact; how the difference in colour after-image relates to different strobe rates; and possibly becoming aware of other physiological changes as the retinal activity affects the rhythm of other areas of the nervous system.

In the same year, Paul Sharits made *Ray Gun Virus,* a fourteen-minute film with no images, which explores the optical interaction of single-colour frames. Also in 1966 he completed two other films which rely heavily on the optical interaction of colour, but both of these, *Word Movie* and *Piece Mandala (End War)* also contain associative material, in the first instance rapidly changing

words, in the second single-frame images of himself and a couple. It is only in *Ray Gun Virus* and *N:O:T:H:I:N:G;* (1968) that the optical experience is uninterrupted by associative or semantic issues which also encroach on his longer optical colour works of 1968, *Razor Blades* and *T,O,U,C,H,I,N,G*.

In his work as a whole we see a pull in three directions. The first is the obvious factor of colour interactions in time, which affect the retina; the second is a confusing romanticism which results in unintegrated images and inappropriate interpretation of the material aspect of the experience; the third is a systemic intention in the overall form of his films. The interesting interaction is between the first and last. It is in the nature of the autonomic experience that it should be localized in the immediate clusters of perception, counteracting awareness of his overall systemic concept. In Conrad's *The Flicker,* the overall experience is due to awareness of gradually changing modes of perception.

From *Abstract Film and Beyond*, Studio Vista/M.I.T. Press, 1977

JOHN DU CANE

Notes on Films

John Du Cane

My films explore dialectical relations between the viewer's cognitive systems and the systems established within the film. The effort to locate structures generates virtual transformations of the actual structure. The emphasis is toward establishing a self-reflective consciousness that is aware not only of film elements' manipulation of perceptual response but also of the effect this awareness has as a transforming agent of future response. In *Frame,* for instance, every image in the film is of a window. In the first section two images of two different windows appear for half a second, followed by half a second of black. This structure repeats numerous times, each time with fresh window-images. In the next section, three window-images appear in half a second and the black spacing is slightly reduced. By the final section of the film there is a different window-image every frame ($\frac{1}{24}$ second) and the black spacing is reduced out completely. The viewer experiences how the spatio-temporal context of the film image modifies that image, how that modification is changed by a change in the spatio-temporal context and finally how his own perceptual limitations effectually transform out of recognition that spatio-temporal context, to a state where the perceptual distinction between a specific image and its context is broken down.

In the earlier film *Aspects* the camera view of a passageway space changes gradually from slow motion to fast. A number of lense-angle changes, alternately compressing and expanding the space, draw attention to the relation between film-speed, lense-angle and the subjective perception of their objective representation of that given space. Disruption of the continuum-illusion is strongly emphasized by bursts of rapid cutting that break down the grasp of both real and film time. As its title implies *Lenseless* was filmed without a lense on the camera, except for very brief bursts that serve to locate the filming context. Different speeds of camera movement and film (ASA and fps), forwards, reverse, upside down, are broken into four separate images within one frame to produce a complex patterning of 'pure' light. At its best I hope that the dialectical relations of the virtual and the actual, of a cognitive system and of the transformational substantiation of that cognitive system into the material, a function as sensuous play, in other words, function within

the content of an experimental dialectic. Cognition culminates in the sensuous recognition of itself. Or: the content is the reflected experience of the cognitive. What is embodied in this conception is the negation of systems of domination, that is, of hierarchal structure, established between the artist and the experiences.

A Survey of the Avant-Garde in Britain,
Vol. 3, Gallery House, 1972

JOYCE WIELAND

Wieland's Sailboat and '1933'

Regina Cornwell

. . . Since 1967, Wieland has centred more and more of her artistic energies in film. In considering her work from this period, those short films of a more formal nature – *Sailboat, 1933, Dripping Water* and *Hand Tinting* – will be examined first. Chronologically, *Sailboat* (1967–68) is the earliest of these. In a series of shots a sailboat is seen moving across the screen from left to right. The title is superimposed on the screen for the duration of the film. Its sound consists of waves mixed with an airplane engine and occasional voices. None of the shots is repeated, but the same boats recur because Wieland carefully anticipated them with her camera by moving down the shore to await their reentry into the frame. A number of the shots are animated, as when a boat appears to pop back from the right to the centre and off right again. Several other small things occur to disrupt expectancies and make the viewer attend to the images more carefully. As the last two boats begin to fade into the horizon, they seem, at the same time, to be absorbed by the more pronounced film grain in these very light shots. This and other instances in *Sailboat* stress film's dual nature, on the one hand, presenting images, while at the same time breaking through the illusions to expose the film material itself. And, as a further example, even while attending to the image, one is forced to note the 'presence' of the boats somewhere off-frame, and thus also to note the frame itself, delimiting the image. And the flat letters of the title contrast sharply with the illusory images over which they are superimposed.

While the superimposed title in *Sailboat* literalizes itself through the images, the title *1933* (1967–68) does nothing of the kind. Wieland commented that one day after shooting she returned home with about thirty feet of film remaining in her camera and proceeded to empty it by filming the street scene below. She explains in notes: 'When editing then what I considered the real footage I kept coming across the small piece of film of the street. Finally I junked the real film for the accidental footage of the street. It was a beautiful piece of blue street . . . So I made the right number of prints of it plus fogged ends'. The street scene with the white streaked end is loop-printed ten times, and *1933* appears systematically on the street scene for only the first, fourth, seventh, and tenth loops. Wieland says of her choice of the name: '. . . a title

that causes more questions than the film has answers.' And later, that it 'makes you think of a film's beginning. But, this is the film'. While the meaning of the title, *1933,* is enigmatic and has no real and ostensible relationship to the film's street scene and white streaked section, in its systematic use as sub-title, it becomes an image incorporated into the film. It is not the title of a longer work, but an integral part of the work.

And while the title remains unexplained, so does the brief loop action of the street in fast motion, slowing down for a moment and then resuming its speed. It is merely a fragment of incomplete action, moving in and out of and around the frame. Each time something else is perceived. Not only is the street footage seen over and over, but it is seen in unreal time. And its illusory three-dimensionality is sharply contrasted with the flatness of the white section. Even more markedly than in *Sailboat,* all of these factors become, to use film-maker Ken Jacobs' term, 'illusion-defeating devices,' which call attention to the strip of film as film. And the white dominated sections incorporated into the film assert themselves as valid images, equal to the street scenes.

Extract from an article in *Artforum*

Afterword

The following review of *Structural Film Anthology* appeared in *Screen,* Winter 1976/77

In '"Ontology" and "Materialism" in Film' (*Screen* v 17 n 1, Spring 1976), Peter Wollen argued that the joint concern of North-American film-makers such as Paul Sharits and European ones like Godard with a critique of cinematic illusionism diverged in their respective emphases on the machines producing the illusions, the camera, the gate, the celluloid, the printer, the projector, the screen, and on the signifying process denegated in those illusions, the discursive processes of films, their codes. The first emphasis tends to cut film off from its immediate and explicit involvement in ideology into a closed circle of self-reference; the latter to make that involvement the centre of the film-maker's practice. However, as well as divergence, Peter Wollen sees a tendency towards convergence in the increased interest of the North Americans and their European counterparts of the Co-op movement in signification and an apparent decline of the other European avant-garde.

The Avant-Garde Event at the [1976] Edinburgh Festival was organised with this possible convergence in view. Film-maker participants largely represented the North-American independents and the European Co-op movement. However, the convergence did not take place, and the divisions did not conform to the material/signification opposition. The first session, on the notion of avant-garde, divided the Europeans from the (predominantly New Yorker) North-Americans, who interpreted the criticism offered as 'no different from Tom Wolfe' (Sharits) and resented the implication of political irresponsibility. Subsequently, the difference, which might have been no more than a matter of local loyalties, took on a more complex political colour, expressed most clearly in the opposition between Joyce Wieland and Birgit and Wilhelm Hein. In her new film, *The Far Shore,* Wieland has attempted to make a genuinely Canadian film (as opposed to a US film), made with Canadian money, technicians, actors, story, distribution and for a Canadian mass audience. In so doing she has abandoned the modernism characteristic not only of *Sailboat* and *1933,* but also of films with similar political preoccupations to *The Far Shore* such as *Solidarity* and *Pierre Vallières.* It is as if the political and aesthetic sides of her projects were separable. Sharits's aim to emulate Rembrandt in making great works of film art is simply the other side

of the coin. For the Heins, on the other hand, the modernism is the political point; information pure of any ulterior motive in communication is the definition of the aesthetic message and the purity represents the freeing of the recipient from ideological imposition. Hence the problems are those of dissemination and of overcoming the mystification of proletarian film-goers. Wieland adapts her aesthetic to a political problem seen fundamentally in terms of distribution; the Heins treat distribution as a secondary problem subordinate to the fundamental one of aesthetic strategy.

Much of the work done by the film-makers of the European Co-ops and that of most of the North-American film-makers represented at Edinburgh could be argued to fit into the category defined in 1969 by P. Adams Sitney to place a new type of films after those of Brakhage and Warhol, being made predominantly in New York, but also elsewhere in North America and in Europe: 'Structural film'. In May and June of 1976, the National Film Theatre in London held a short season of films under this title, organised by Peter Gidal and accompanied by a booklet edited by Gidal containing interviews and criticism of the film-makers represented and providing a cross-section of views on structural film. The season thus presented a wider range of this trend of film-making and the anthology a less polemical set of terms for its analysis than had been possible at Edinburgh because of the wider scope of the notion of avant-garde adopted there and the confusion of many of the discussions.

However, it cannot be said that the immediate effect of season or anthology is to dispel the kind of confusions that dominated Edinburgh. One of the virtues of both season and anthology is the fact that Gidal aimed catholically to include representatives of most work which has been labelled 'structural' and most kinds of discussion of such work; he is at pains to point out that inclusion in either does not represent an endorsement on his part, and in his introduction, 'Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film', he attempts to define the tendency of contemporary film-making he would support, singling it out with the qualification '*materialist*' and including a much smaller group of film-makers and by no means all of the work of all of them.

Hence immediately there is a taxonomic problem. Sitney's definition, essentially based on the perception of a concern for shape and duration in these films and the use of the strategies of fixed camera, flicker, loop printing and rephotography, has been outstripped by subsequent developments of film-makers and films still classified as 'structuralist'; many of the films in the season, for example, make minimal or no use of his strategies. Annette Michelson, discussing the New York film-makers, notes that their films represent a break with the previous concern of American 'alternative' cinema from Maya Deren on to counterpose to the dominance of narrative in the Hollywood film a dominance of the poetic, reaching its apogee in the hypnagogic imagery of Brakhage, and that this break tends to throw film-makers back on to problems of narrative (*Anthology*, pp 38-44); Sitney's 'goal-directed duration' has clear narrative implications in a film like Michael Snow's *Wavelength*, and *La Région Centrale*, which lacks *Wavelength's* clear direc-

tional pattern, revolves (literally) around the problem of the source, the 'centre' of narration, with its unattended mechanised universally mobile camera, visible only in its shadow, its movements accompanied by aural signals, in the midst of a wilderness. [. . .] Deke Dusinberre, in a piece on Gidal's own *Room Film 1973* in the *Anthology* and at greater length in an article in *Afterimage* n 6 adds to this that the North-American structural film-makers' work tends to rely on metaphorical or allegorical reference and to depend on commentary to that effect such as is often provided in interviews and statements by the artist and criticism emanating from writers in close contact with the New York 'school'; their refusal of this strategy marks off the English film-makers linked to the London Film-makers' Co-op, who are, moreover, by no means homogeneous; those superficially closer to the North Americans, such as Gidal himself, represent an attempt to hew to a strictly 'structural' line, avoiding relapse into narrative or metaphor; others concentrate their work more in the projection situation as such (Malcolm LeGrice, Anthony McCall); and still others have developed a variety of film-making strategies where properties or processes of the object photographed, usually a landscape, in some way dictate the structure of the film. It is thus unclear to what extent 'structural film' still constitutes, if it ever did, a valid category for the classification of a group of independently made films, and what features might be taken as central to its definition.

Peter Gidal's introduction to the *Anthology* is less concerned with taxonomy and more with defining and arguing for a strategy of his own, represented by his own work and that being done by some other film-makers in England, and by some done a few years ago now by North-American 'structuralists'. The introduction has been criticised by Anne Cottringer in *Afterimage* n 6. She attacks Gidal for falling back on the 'material' side of Wollen's material/signification opposition, and there are passages where this charge can be justified. However, the essay is complex and open to other readings. In other passages, Gidal insists that 'the assertion of film as material . . . merely sets off another level of abstract (or non-abstract) associations. . . . There are myriad possibilities for co/optation and integration of filmic procedures into the repertoire of meaning' (pp 2-3). Hence the relapses into narrative and allegory noted by Michelson and Dusinberre, and Gidal himself adds another danger: emphasis on the pure act of making the film, whether documentation of it, representation of it by marks of its absence (leader to represent the time of the changing of the magazine, etc) or marked attempts to suppress personal intervention in the process (as in minimal painting and sculpture), merely re-establish the artist as object of identification. Valuable works are those that 'escape' through the gaps left by these traps, instanced by Klee's use of the 'nearly empty signifier . . . the image taken does not have a ready associative analogue, is not a given symbol or metaphor or allegory' (p 7). This may have occurred despite the artist's own notions of his or her work, but the escape should rather be 'an adequate solution of questions correctly posed in terms of materialist practice and theoretical embodiment' (p 7). Hence the two quotations which close Gidal's film *Condition of Illusion*:

first a protest from Althusser against ideologies which purport to theoretical status but are merely adapted to a goal pre-determined outside them; then a passage from a novel by Samuel Beckett on the continuing necessity to speak despite its radical impossibility. Genuine theory is required if that necessity is not continually to project the film-maker into the reproduction of ideology.

Gidal is right to emphasise the low level of theorisation of other kinds of film than narrative, and his criticisms of *Screen*'s neglect in this respect are quite justified; but to demand of theory that it make possible a true reflexiveness in film as opposed to the false reflexiveness of the representation of the process is precisely to make the impossible demand – that theory should enable one to 'watch oneself watching' (p 10). The result is the tendency noted by Cottringer for the essay to fall back behind the quotations from Derrida it contains into a metaphysics of presence and consciousness of self.

Yet this comment is perhaps still too much to suggest that Gidal has made a mistake – that slightly clearer sight on his part would have put him on the right track. Rather the domination of the situation of independent film-making by the separation of aesthetic concerns and problems of distribution noted vis-à-vis the debates at Edinburgh last summer forces attempts to theorise into this problematic. The value of Gidal's work and of that of some of the other contributors to the *Anthology* is that in attempting to hold together a commitment to a revolutionary political position in film-making and the experience of film-making in the independent sector at the present time it forces these contradictions into the open and provides approaches for future work.

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